HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT

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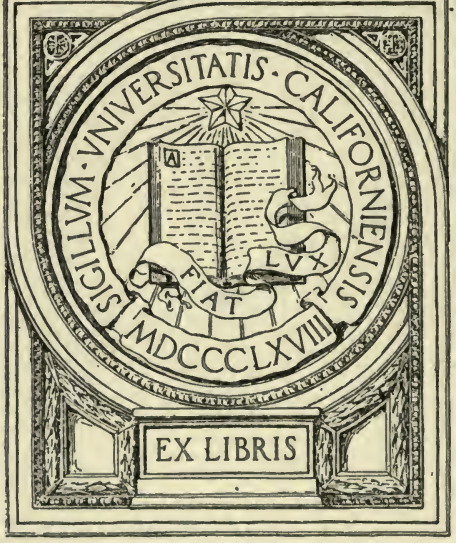

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THE WINTER BELL

BOOKS BY
HENRY M. RIDEOUT

THE WINTER BELL
FERN SEED
THE FOOT-PATH WAY
TIN COWRIE DASS
THE FAR CRY
KEY OF THE FIELDS
and BOLDERO
THE SIAMESE CAT
WHITE TIGER

WILLIAM JONES

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

With rapid sureness of touch he printed across the board, gripped flat between his knees, "Sackamore."

THE WINTER BELL

By

HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT

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To

JAMES ARTHUR BALLENTINE

WITH ALL THAT IS IMPLIED IN
LONG FRIENDSHIP

475365

ILLUSTRATIONS

With rapid sureness of touch he printed across the board, gripped flat between his knees, "Sackamore." . . . *Frontispiece*

"Good evening, Mr. Delaforce," she said gravely. "How do you do?" . Page 36

With a swoop, a lightning shift of hands, a bend, clutch and heave in one motion, Salem had the man aloft. . . Page 110

"No feelin's to hurt, hey?" rumbled the deep voice of Captain Constantine. "Good. Fust-rate. The clear thing." . . Page 142

THE WINTER BELL

THE WINTER BELL

I

In all the last thin drift of snowstorm that swept the lake and made it a wilderness without borders, there appeared only one dark object. This was a man on snowshoes, who came with the wind at his back. Smoking flights of dry snow continually outstripped him; his breath whirled ahead and vanished in them; so that his advance over the white waste had a labored air, as if he were lagging amid universal hurry.

Anyone who had tried to keep pace with him would have found this retardation a mere fancy, perhaps a painful fancy after half an hour or so; for Salem Delaforce was moving rapidly, with a light swing more trot than walk. A white rabbit, hanging dead at his waist in front, joggled as if trying limply to run, head downward. Big-boned, spare, Salem had even in winter wrap-

pings a look of slenderness which, like his present gait, deceived the eye. Kersey trousers tucked into yellow oil-tanned "larrigans," and an old brownish blanket coat mottled with ermine-like dabs of pale red and gray, hung loose upon him to disguise the power of his frame. Snow plastered his back, but was chafed away by a shotgun that swung there, its muzzle ringed with two frozen doughnuts. Melting snow on the lashes fringed his dark brown eyes; through moisture as of tears they looked out, steady, thoughtful, young, and very bright. His cheeks glowed.

Once he halted and turned impulsively to face the wind. The white rabbit hanging at his waist had its fur immediately blown into ruffled partings.

"Lord, forgot again!" said the hunter angrily. "Thought he was followin' me. Never no more."

He peered for a moment into the snow. It pricked his face like needles. Yet the range of his vision over the lake had widened, for these flying wraiths began to lose their whiteness. The wind whistled in his gun barrel. There was also a hissing, gritty sound that streamed by, a sound as of sifting, very faint, but notable, a change throughout the solitude.

"Goin' to sleet." Salem went forward again. "I keep thinkin' he's after me. Never no more."

The youngster's dark eyes contracted, his lips worked strangely. He rubbed one snow-crusted mitten roughly across them, and then, like a man who had driven away some pain of body or grief of mind, went swinging on with the wind, his face hard set, almost grim.

"We'll git a thaw pooty quick."

His bear-paw snowshoes left their oval prints in a track which, so far as it could be seen, drew a rigidly straight line on the snow. Without need of thought, by homing instinct, from one hidden point far behind toward another far ahead, through blind swirling space he had come direct; and now this change in the air—a slight clearing while drifts no longer spun upward from the lake, and the snowfall turned as from fine dry salt to pellets of sago—affected his march not at all. He kept the same course, the same untiring, rapid jog.

Half an hour later he swerved from this bee line. A bald round patch of ice lay before him, clean swept in a freak by the wind, like a pond made ready for skaters. He began to skirt the left-hand margin, but when halfway round, stopped.

On the opposite rim of the ice appeared another dark object. At first glance it resembled

the butt of a small log; at second glance, an uprooted stump with a brown clod of earth.

Salem turned and went quickly toward it, his snowshoes clattering and slipping as on green glass.

It was, or had been, a man. The head, shoulders, and one arm lay on the ice, all the rest hidden, as if he had pulled up a coverlet before going to sleep. The face, turned away, had its right cheek frozen in, and a wisp of snow across the left eye like a bandage.

Salem crouched on one knee, looked intently, then came upright again. He took, it might have been thought, great pains not to touch this body. The wind, as before, prolonged a droning whistle in his gun barrel, and when he spoke, wrenched the words out of his lips.

"It's Asy Beard."

The dead man's face had nothing of that dignity which sometimes is granted. Even by what few features were revealed it had a mean, wolfish look. The lips, parted as if to sneer, clung hard along broken teeth, tobacco-stained, that looked all canine. Two kinds of snow, fine and coarse, had pelted into the rusty brown stiff hair, and gave it the likeness, cruelly exact, of a bit of old doormat.

The living man's face remained inscrutable. The color of health and storm-blown exercise, darkly flaming in his cheeks, could not alter. His eyes did not, perhaps: they contained much musing, some natural pity, but no dread and no surprise.

"Well, Asy," he said, "guess we're even now. Him that dies pays all off."

He stooped again, and after a longer interval than before, again rose.

"You're fast to the ice. Ain't got nothin' with me. Some pesky thief carried off my axe."

It was no weather to stand still in, but for a time the young man waited there, keeping his fellow creature company. When at last he went forward the sleet as it drove was dissolving into a chill rain. Not far ahead the end of the lake grew visible, a cove where land and water were marked off only by smooth-curving snowbanks, with here and there a clump of willow switches or the long white slant of a buried pine trunk fallen years ago. Above these, darkening the cove, stood firs all padded white on the windward side, all green and shadow-black on the leeward. Above their jagged points, in turn, low hills advanced through the departing sleet, some dark evergreen, others—bare rock too steep for snow

to cling on—a grayness lined vertically with threads of white birch.

Midway in the cove Salem climbed ashore, pausing at a hole chopped in the ice, and a stake on which hung a black tin can upside down. He broke the new ice in the hole, filled the can, then went straight toward the deepest bend of the fir wall. Here, muffled with snow, hidden like an animal by its marking, a cabin crouched among the boughs. He passed round this and entered a small clearing behind.

At the back of the clearing a fire burned low under an iron pot. It had been a large fire, for up the nearest white wall reached an evergreen band where snow had melted from fir tips, and round its embers in a wide ring last year's woodland carpet lay bared—yellow grass, leather-brown brakes, the dark red gloss of old checkerberry leaves, and one bright green spray of princess pine. Smoke still mounted into the drizzle, and the rim of the pot lid steamed.

Bringing dry wood from a lean-to behind his cabin, Salem gathered his fallen fire and made it high again.

"Like to ketch the thief," he told himself, "that moseyed off with my axe."

While the fresh blaze was growing he laid his

mittens on the pot, removed from his gun barrel the frozen doughnuts, placed them to thaw beside the mittens, and set some willow-bark tea brewing in the tin can. He worked with method, like one who used time thriftily but had no need for haste. From the lean-to, where he hung under cover his gun and the white rabbit, he brought an oblong bit of pine board, a hammer, some old crooked hand-wrought nails, a two-foot wooden stake, a hoe, a shovel, a corner of broken glass, and a flat, rusty iron fragment of sled runner. This last he poked into the fire. Then, taking off snowshoes, he sat on one beneath a bough, arranged the other as a table or workbench, and so, warmed by the fire, sheltered from the mist, continued quietly busy.

"Go down to Corp'ration House, ought to, and tell 'em about Asy Beard." With the broken glass he smoothed one surface of the pine board. " 'Tain't right to leave him layin' out there. But no good my tellin' 'em after dark. Better start to-morrow daylight in the mornin', git there early forenoon, then keep on down to Middle Landin' store. Make one journey of two arrants."

Having smoothed the board, Salem turned to his noonday meal. It was lean fare, nothing but willow-bark tea and the pair of moist, luke-

warm doughnuts. He ate and drank like a stoic whose thoughts went elsewhere.

"Le's see what we want to the store—besides a axe. Tea's give out, tobacco's give out. Matches, and maybe a little sugar."

He soon fell to work again. With the board gripped flat between his knees he drew from the heart of the fire his broken sled runner. Its point glowed orange red, starred with tiny bright sparks that vanished. Round its cooler end he wrapped a wet mitten. It made an awkward tool, all weight and no balance; but in Salem's thin brown hands it quivered no more than a pencil. With rapid sureness of touch, unhindered by the smoke curling thickly upward, he wrote or printed across the board. His lettering was neat, his alignment true.

"SACKAMORE"

Delaforce laid his branding iron down, blew off the charred powder, and shook his head.

"Can't even spell," he grumbled. "Prob'ly ain't right. I don't know nothing."

He nailed the board to the stake, put it aside with his tools, brought out from one pocket an old cheap wooden pipe, from another some dried willow bark mixed with sweet fern, and compos-

ing himself cross-legged, took a meditative smoke. He had not rested since daybreak. Even now he was only waiting for the fire to burn low again; and by the time his second pipeful went out he waited no longer, but impatiently rising, lifted the iron pot away, grasped his hoe, and began to tear down the fire.

"Git it over with."

He dug fiercely, scattering brands and coals that hissed as they turned black and bedded themselves in snow. Under the ashes appeared a shallow trench, its floor and walls of half-thawed mud. Salem cut them deeper and wider, until his hoe sliced through glassy honeycomb, the crystals of the frost. He then poured in scalding water from the pot, waited, and after the steam had cleared from a new depth of mud, began hoeing again. This process he repeated many times. When the pot was empty and the hoe could fetch out no more chips of frozen earth, he drove the stake in upright at the far end of the hole, so that board and legend stood facing him, level with the ground.

"Have to do. Deep as I can manage."

He waded among the trees, and with a knife slashed off an armful of small fir branches. Carrying them, the young man would have had a

Christmaslike air but for the steady Indian sadness of his eyes.

"Better for him than bare ground."

He lined the pit carefully with the Christmas greens, placing and replacing them till every tip lay in order.

"There."

His next action was to clear away tools, all but the shovel. Having done this he went round to the door of the cabin.

"Can't hardly bear to go in."

Salem wiped his snowshoes cleaner than usual, grasping at any means of delay. It was with reluctance, visible effort, that he opened the door and entered. His dwelling, one room sheathed with black paper, and very dark by contrast even with the subdued, rainy light of the woods, contained a stove, a bunk, table and chairs, a cupboard, tiers of stove wood against the wall, and along the rafters a few spare clothes, household goods, and small pelts of fur. Salem hung his snowshoes by the foot holes on a nail in the black paper. He stood for a moment irresolute.

Across the room in his bunk lay something covered with a blanket, like a child hiding and keeping still. As though it were a child Delaforce lifted and carried this bundle outdoors.

What he unwrapped and lowered into the evergreen grave was the body of a white bull terrier. He was very slow in laying the firs over it, but swift in putting back the clotted earth.

"You was a good friend. None better."

He rose to look at the board and his dog's name.

"I won't never forget you." His face was hard while he spoke, but not his eyes. "Part o' the best days o' my life buried with you."

The rain had ceased when darkness came that night, and with darkness a still and bitter frost creeping to the heart of the woods. No air stirred. Even the dry leaves of a young beech near the cabin, that since last autumn had waggled and whispered foolishly in lesser silences, were dumb. Salem, eating a late supper by the light of a candle end, now heard the fire snap cheerfully in the stove behind him, now listened to trees groaning far off, to noises harsh and brittle as the breaking of a file.

There were left in his plate some bones of the rabbit he had brought home. Without thinking Salem took one of these and held it round behind his chair.

"Here you are," he said.

The stillness recalled him. He looked down,

saw the empty floor, dashed the bone furiously from his hand, and turning, blew out the candle.

Frost veiled the bottom of each windowpane, but left at the top a curved space clear. Cold stars glittered above the whiteness where his enemy lay. They could not throw unwelcome light into this room from which his friend had gone, or know that he saw them as crosses.

II

WELL filled with hardwood, the stove always kept its fire going for two hours. A light sleeper, Salem had formed the habit of rousing before the room grew cold, so that his night was broken at regular intervals. From deep slumber he came quietly awake, each time to find a bed of coals glowing like orange-red flowers, to cover them with kindling, split birch, and round maple, to glance at the starlight for signs of weather, and to be next moment in his bunk asleep for two hours more.

Dawn found him on foot, beginning his day. The frost no longer murmured or groaned without. A gentle clashing and crackle seemed to fill the obscurity. On every windowpane the little hill-and-valley landscape of frost work had thickened with furry whiteness during the night, but left near its top a loophole of melting glaze through which the outdoor world shone as a mist of intense pale blue. This color and the

strange airy clashing pervaded all things like a wonder that longed to be understood.

Salem was aware of it. He knew the sound, he felt the quality of the light.

"Lon'some mornin's without you, Sack," was all he said. "Maybe Duster Whiteneck's kep' one of them pups of yours, to town. I'll haf to see Duster. If he'd sell, take along my black-cat skin."

For breakfast he had what was left of the rabbit stew, warmed over with hardtack sopped in gravy, and more willow tea; no meal to linger over. The sun had not risen when he stepped outdoors, though all the mysterious pale blue vapor was gone, and the clear eastern sky brightening. From the cabin eaves a row of new icicles hung, broad and short, in the Saxon tooth pattern.

"Crust'll hold. Don't need ye." Talking thus to his snowshoes he slung them with his gun on his back. "May, though, comin' home."

Over his breast like a magnificent boa he carried some furs—two of mink, one of musquash, and one, somewhat like sable, which he called his black-cat, the rare and beautiful fur of a fisher. Any expert would have admired the skinning and cleaning. Salem betrayed no pride, but counted them and smoothed the hair. Each had been

shot through the head by a man who despised traps. He shouldered two long faggot-like bundles of split hoop poles, cast a look at the cabin to see all tight, and set out briskly.

The footing held, as he had predicted. Everywhere below the trees undulated a surface glimmering with dull polish like that on the icing of cake. Now and then it cracked under his moccasin boots, leaving a wide shallow depression, where powdery snow burst upward among triangular plates of crust; but this happened seldom, for he went with a practised gliding step as clean and true as the motion of a skater. Between the firs an abandoned logging road, unbroken, flowed like a white brook. It brought him suddenly out upon Lambkill Heath while the sun was clearing the evergreen tops.

"Gorry, but she's handsome!" thought Salem.

The heath, its buried tufts wavy with bluish hollows and white mounds, dazzled him as the early sunshine poured across. But this was nothing to the glory that ringed it about, far and near. A crystal forest shone with twinkling white fire. Young birches, maples and poplars, ice coated, their boughs drooped like weeping willow, caught the full blaze of morning sun in a network brighter than jewels. Whenever a breath of wind stirred,

the twigs, like so many thousand glass pendants, clattered faintly and swung on from tree to tree a passing lustre that sparkled along the entire wall of the woods.

Walking high over the heath-top waves, Delaforce did not stop to admire. He felt an exaltation on his journey; but this was gone next moment when he saw his long-drawn shadow traveling alone, with no dog's shadow trotting after on the snow; he had known more than one silver thaw; and though in the middle of the heath he paused, it was only to listen.

Through the crackling brightness of the enchanted forest he heard a sound. It came from behind him, perhaps more than a mile away, but clear in the winter air—the ringing of a bell, a little bell with a mellow tone, jangled slowly in broken rhythm, as if by an uncertain but persevering hand.

"A sled comin' down lake," thought Salem. "Pity the shanks of any poor hoss, crustin' it to-day."

With a few last single notes the bell stopped ringing. Salem waited, but heard it no longer, and started on. Ringing or silent, it did not mean much to him at the time.

His track, the disused logging road, began

once more across the heath and curved through the brilliant crystal wood where every twig hung down to end in a sunlit drop of icicle. From this he plunged into evergreen darkness, which continued for an hour or more. Once the smooth white ribbon of crust was broken; something heavy had wallowed across it to go smashing on through the firs; and Salem, who knew this damage for the work of a bear, dropped his merchandise, unslung his gun, crawled among boughs and loosened snow, jumped up, and ran like an Indian along the edge of the bear's track. Not so fresh as it looked, after two miles of hot pursuit it vanished among naked crags and horsebacks, gray, wind-swept rock. Without look or gesture of disappointment Salem returned quietly to take up his furs and hoop poles again.

The sun was high when he came down Rum-Time Hill toward the flowage. Here his old forgotten road joined a stream that wandered away from the lake. Ice had now melted off the trees, their fairyland shining departed; so that under little promontory shadows a lilac mist of alders, a tawny mist of willows, followed the crooks of the flowage, which revealed itself here as black ice, there as thin curved patches of crust.

"Gained on me."

Salem halted, and listened.

The little mellow bell was jangling once more, slowly, not far upstream. Once more it made fitful music in the solitude, as if rung by an uncertain but persevering hand. He had no knowledge of how that hand could persevere, or how, to some book-learned persons, it might have seemed the hand of a blind goddess who comes at her own pace everywhere.

By early afternoon he sighted Corporation House, a gray sag-roofed cabin, relic of other days, that lingered, not yet ready to fall, where dry cat-tails whispered and shivered in a frozen marsh. From its chimney smoke went mounting past frayed hackmatack points on a sky of more than midsummer blue. Salem climbed the bank, tossed his long hoop-pole faggots down, knocked at the door, and put his head inside. It was a familiar room that he saw, gloomy, though lighted by one square window in the opposite gable. It smelled of hay mattresses and of green wood trying to burn.

"And so the old man," droned a lazy voice from somewhere on the floor—"so the old feller he muckles to his pipe, and he squats, and s'e, 'Chop 'em down, Dan; I feel like rottin'.' "

Some interminable story paused, while two

listeners gazed at the open door and the newcomer. They sat smoking, each on the end of a bunk, with a rusty stove between them.

"Hallo, Sale," said one. He was a long, dark, thin, melancholy young man.

"Why, Sale Delfers, 'tis." The second, who looked like the first in a disguise of age, with white hair and narrow white whisker, peered and made sure before speaking. "How'd ye git here, Sale?"

"Afoot." Salem knew the pair well. It was Pum Redman, of Wing Dam, and his father. "How are ye? And Trapper Kingcome still a-layin' behind the stove tellin' lies?"

The floor trembled as a great weight shifted on the boards, and next moment a face like a red and freckled moon rose, grinning, through the blur of heat waves that danced above the stove.

"Hallo, boy!" This interrupted story-teller was a huge, broad man, all solid flesh and lazy good humor. His pale red hair seemed to flicker in the heat, his pale blue eyes to wink between raddled slumber and acute watching. "Come in, shut the door, we hain't brass monkeys. Afoot, hey? And alon'? Where's dog?"

Salem entered.

"Someb'dy poisoned him on me," he replied.

"Who?" All three men spoke at once. Young Pum, of Wing Dam, shook his head mournfully; old Pum removed his pipe to stare; Trapper Kingcome swore loud and deep. "Who did?"

"I do' know." Salem tugged off his mittens and spread his hands over the stove. "What I come down to tell ye was, Asy Beard's dead. And git help. Found him fast to the lake, half froze in. Out on the ice not fur from my cove. Didn't have nothin' to chop him free."

Silence greeted this news; a silence which, as Delaforce went on warming his hands, was gradually broken by the jangle of the solitary bell outdoors.

"That's goin' to look bad, maybe, Sale," said Kingcome quietly.

Salem glanced up in surprise. He found them all watching him as if with doubt.

"What's goin' to?"

"You and Asy fought over that dog," declared Trapper.

"So we did, last fall. I licked him fair," said Salem. "And Asy twenty pound heavier than me. A good twenty."

Trapper's moon face, dotted and flaming, wore an unwonted gravity.

"Fo'ks'll think ——" He paused and shook

his big head. "Asy Beard swore to kill that dog, and you 'lowed if he did —— Fo'ks heard ye, Sale. You said 'twould be the last dog ever he'd lay his dirty hand on."

Young Pum gave a disconsolate nod.

"Yeah," said he. "That's right, too."

Salem, with his hands outspread but forgotten, stared from one to another of these men. He felt great amazement and a little anger. They were all three good friends of his.

"Why, what in tunket ails ye?" he cried. "I never touched him!"

What his hearers thought of this declaration he could not fathom. They continued to eye him strangely. The mellow clanging of the sled bell quickened and came with a final hurry, a slap-slap of trace chains on thills, and the sharp-edged noise of runners ripping the crust. A pause followed, a moment of stillness; and then a voice hailed Corporation House.

"Hey! Who's in?"

All four men went to the door without haste.

The keen blue sky, the afternoon sunlight on the snow, made them blink like drowsy animals coming out of a cavern. Below them, close at hand, two ragged lines of bush tops marked where the road curved between flowage and cat-tail

marsh; and here a steaming bay horse, his winter coat frosted white down his neck, along his collar and round the root of his tail, stood harnessed to a sled. A pair of strangers, bulky in fur coats, one of black bear and one of brown-dyed sheepskin, clung each to a stake and peered upward. What little of their faces could be seen glowed fiery. Between them on the sled lay something flat under a blanket.

The driver, in the bearskin, wrapped his reins round a sled stake and beckoned.

"We got a dead man here." He spoke not without gusto. "Found him on the lake this mornin'. Come see if it's anybody ye know."

The Redmans, father and son, obeyed. Trapper Kingcome, as he began to follow, gave Salem a brief stare, remarkable in such lazy pale orbs for its hardness.

"I don't want to look on him again," said Salem, and remained leaning in the doorway.

He saw the driver stoop unwieldily to roll back the horse blanket, while his friends gathered in line, forming with the strangers a wall of backs that hid the sled. He heard the driver's tone of relish and importance.

"We been up there gittin' out knees for the Grecian Bend. . . . Yeah. You know her; three-

master, is to be, on Honey Cocksall's ways. . . . Yeah. Coming out this forenoon we run acrost this poor feller." The exhibitor lowered his voice. It rumbled on. "Hit him 'bove the right ear with the blunt of a axe. . . . What I say. . . . Yeah. There's the axe. Found her under the snow alongside him. . . . What was left o' snowshoe tracks, them bobtail kind, plain enough in the crust f'm where he laid to a camp ashore. Who lived there?"

Salem heard no answer; but he saw Kingcome's great bulk move. Quietly, as if having seen enough, Trapper drew back and turned sauntering up to the house.

He passed in without a look, but whispered fiercely from the corner of his mouth, "Come here, Sale! Come here!"

No sooner had the young man joined him than with the same ferocity, quick and silent as a pouncing cat, he closed the door, gripped Salem's arm, and swung him across the room to the bunk below the gable window. His free hand was holding out a little heap of silver coins and dirty green paper.

"You take this. All I got on me." His broad, freckled face burned with excitement. "Out that winder, and make tracks acrost the border!

Quick! The man's a depatty shariff down to Middle Landin'. I know him. He's got your axe. You're the only one round here wears that pattrun o' snowshoe. Come, shin out!"

Salem did nothing but look bewilderment. He had never seen Trapper like this, transformed, except in time of danger to somebody else. It was the trait by which the gross lounger and gossip had first won him.

"No." He pushed Kingcome's hand away.

"Take it. Pay me back when ye git somewheres safe."

Not Trapper's words but his eyes, began to have meaning.

"What?" cried Salem in horror. "Do you think I done it?"

The other let go his arm, tried to stifle his mouth.

"Never mind what I think! You git! Clear out or they'll hang ye, boy."

Footsteps and voices were coming up the bank.

"I never touched him," said Salem. His brown eyes rebuked this friend. "Told ye so once a'ready."

A deliberate, padded knocking sounded throughout the room; somebody at the threshold

kicked snow from his moccasins. The door began to open.

"Oh, why didn' ye?" Trapper groaned, and sat down on the bunk like one exhausted. "Never knowed such a young fool!"

III

ONE day in the following spring Salem had reason to think his friend Trapper Kingcome right. It was a very fine day. With eyes closed or eyesight lost a man would have known how fine, and of what season; for besides an unmistakable new mildness in the air, that smell of drying mud which is more delicate than perfume told how earth lay warming, released from winter, uncovered to the sun. Whiffs came now and then from a distant bonfire, aromatic smoke of burning evergreen; these having drifted by, there settled a warm drowsiness through which pine lumber diffused its clean, hearty scent; and in fits of energy, broken by silence and rest, a horsewhip beat on a carpet, volleying broad smacks that echoed.

Salem had not gone blind. The feeling of spring ran in his veins, at once languid and restless, a current overcharged with winter vitality which prompted him to be doing yet checked him by a sleepy surfeit. He knew the season for spring, acknowledged the glory of

the day. He sat on a bench in the town jail of Crossport.

The walls that imprisoned him had once been whitewashed, but now were a crazy patchwork of bare lath, of old lime scratched with obscene words and pictures, and of great brown spider-legged stains left by tobacco juice. One barred window, without glass, admitted near the ceiling enough reflection of sunlight to reveal the broken plaster, from which hung little pinches of reddish cow's hair, and darker knobs where some bygone captive, furious or jocose, had flung his quids to dry. It was a doleful room. It was perhaps the worst place on earth, for a woodsman who had always gone free, to sit in and be reminded of the spring.

"Don't you go nigh it no more." One self spoke to the other self; and weary of their endless wrangle night and day Salem crouched, elbows on knees, to glare downward. "You keep away from that winder."

He knew little about towns or difference of neighborhood, nothing about what he called lock-up houses. This ramshackle den, long scandalous to many decent persons, and soon to be pulled down, he thought was devised, maintained so throughout ages for a peculiar torment

and disgrace. Outside his window lived the scum of the river, wharf-rat men and women; to Salem, in the modesty of ignorance, they were his fellows, his equals, mankind gathered against him terribly in judgment.

He glared down between his feet, seeing a black depth and hating this mankind.

What had happened before, and what he sat dreading most, now happened again. The dim light above him fluttered. He looked up quickly and watched, as before, vague lines of shadow on the ceiling join and divide like scissors.

Then a voice outside called—the voice of someone with a happy thought—"Hey! Le's go see the murd'rer!"

"Where is he?" answered another. "Where they keepin' him?"

"Right over here."

He knew what sound would come next. It came, a scrambling and kicking of boots on clapboards. For the twentieth time that day the window grew dark, and Salem hardened himself to meet the stare of another enemy. Hands gripped the bars; a head, black against the patch of glowing sky, hung motionless for what seemed a long time, for what was in fact so long that the blackness took on features—a heavy nose,

thick lips, and all the foolish countenance of a young green-eyed lout, grinning with broad teeth.

"Hallo!" This thing, like the others, gave a chuckle made somewhat breathless by the effort of holding on. "Hey, how's your neck? It'll know 'fore long how many hund'ed ye weigh behind, a-settin' on air."

The mocker dropped from sight, and left the window clear. Some kind of playful combat followed outside, with bumps and whiskings and feminine squeaks.

"I'll hold ye up jest like a baby."

"O-o-oh, quit that!"

"Sure. I'll histe ye. Hain't it a good pow'ful hand? Set yer pretty little instep right int' the palm of it. Come on, don't be scairt o' me."

"Oh, git out, ye great big tomfool! Some-b'dy'll see us."

Again the window became darkened. A young woman was looking in. She had bright eyes, a hard unvirtuous face, and a silly, gurgling laugh like a lie in her throat. While she gazed as into the den of a wild beast, pretending fear, her eyes beheld nothing and cared less, for they soon turned to cast their distracted light outward and down, in leers of false merriment, sham affection.

"Oh," she cried pertly, "ain't he horruble?"

The word expressed what Salem was thinking of her.

"You quit that! Le' go! Behave! I'll sock you one!"

Her flushed face was gone, the room brighter for its absence.

"Look 's if he'd like to murder us too," said her voice.

"Set-fire 'f he don't!" the other agreed. "Haw, haw!"

The pair moved away, dallying. Salem heard their empty jokes, watched their shadows wheel across the plaster overhead to sink among corner cobwebs, and when alone once more fell back into his brooding rage. The last few days had taught him what mankind was like; yes, and womankind. They came to look at him for sport. He sat here with his griefs, "like a passel o' baboons in a cage," he told himself, while other baboons came and grinned at him all day. This latest couple had seemed the worst; he could bear no more of them; and now as time went slowly by the silence failed to bring comfort, because at any moment they might break it again. His mind was all one raw place that winced in expectation. Or if he made a struggle to forget, then began once more that wrangling of one self

with the other. Salem had never known before that there were two of him. Misfortune, like a wedge in a block, had split the man's fibre, which, being hard and clean, therefore parted groaning. He tried to rejoin the divided halves; but when by pure will he succeeded and held himself together, it was only to think; and thought which did not bear on action, which led toward nothing simple and direct to be done at once, chafed against every torn habit of his life with intolerable pain.

"Nothin' don't seem to fit no more," said Salem.

The light on the ceiling faded, in time, then took a new direction, and brightened. He knew these changes. Early afternoon had dragged past, late afternoon slowly swung toward evening. He was beginning to hope there would be no more visitors that day.

"Ev'body in town must 'a' seen me by now."

But the raw place had still to be prodded. More quietly than was usual, without kicking of clapboards or preparatory joking, someone else had come. Two big freckled fists laid hold of the bars, and like a freckled moon with rays of pale red hair a face heaved up its chin over the sill.

"Listen here, boy."

It was the faithless friend, Trapper Kingcome.

"They tolt me you wouldn' hear o' no lawyer," he whispered. "That right, Sale? Got ye a lawyer yit?"

Salem answered only with a long look.

"You git ye one," said Trapper, in wheedling tones. "Don't go playin' the off ox like that. Nob'dy'll believe ye, alon'. You git ye a good lawyer, 'fore to-morrer."

Salem sprang up, caught his bench by the end, and swung it like a weapon.

"You put!" he growled.

He took only one step forward; there were bars between them; the stout Charley Kingcome was no coward; but something deadly in the fire of Salem's eyes made him drop from the window as for dear life. Salem turned, replaced the bench, and sat down without another word.

For a while he heard Trapper's voice, beyond the wall. He took no heed of what the man might be saying. What had been said was enough, and remained there like a persistent echo in the darkness.

"Nob'dy'll believe ye."

It was enough. All men were liars.

Silence followed; probably a long silence,

for his wrists—and they were not those of a weakling—began to ache like the head which they supported. A horsefly, the earliest of the year, buzzed round the room, tapped the wall with light rasping touches, and made its aimlessness a part of the world's vacancy. Toward sunset, this too fell quiet.

Afterward, from outside, there suddenly rose a brief grating and thumping, as of some hollow object that was dragged along the ground.

"Hallo!" someone hailed from above the window. "What ye doin' down there?"

It was the drawl of old Denny, who kept the lock-up house and dwelt overhead. Jailer, poundmaster, and mild bugbear of truants from school, he was known to look on his duties with a bleareyed philosophical neglect, through haze from a black Woodstock pipe. Salem could hear the rattletrap balcony creak under his deliberate, stocking-footed tread.

"What ye doin' with that box bigger'n yourself?"

From below, after a pause, came an answer.

"I only wanted to see Mr. Delaforce," said a young and rather timid voice.

"Well, you better hyper hom'," replied the old smoker aloft. A loud sucking noise interrupted

his counsel, and a burnt match dropped aslant past the window. "Be'n too many of ye, guess. He don't want to see no more. Be'n pestered plenty enough t'-day. You jest kite along and let him stay put."

The dialogue seemed to end. But inside his dirty room a thing was happening to Salem which he could not understand. All day long he had suffered because this careless jailer would not drive his tormentors away; he had renounced the world with every person in it; but now he found himself under the abhorred window, straining upward, and calling out.

"Let her come!" he cried. "You never stopped the others, Denny. Let her come! Treat me fair. She's the first one who hain't called me—"

He choked, and stood breathing hard, his arms raised, his fists trembling against the daylight. Presently the old man grumbled overhead, and stumped away. Again the box drew near, grating hollow on pebbles. A child, or someone light and small as a child, mounted it; pale brown fingers rested on the sill; and then a head younger than his own looked down at him, calmly.

This late comer was a girl. The evening sun which poured across the front of the jail glowed on her right cheek and darkened the left with

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"Good evening, Mr. Delaforce," she said gravely. "How do you do?"

shadow. Tucked between her lips for convenience in hauling or climbing, and forgotten, a dandelion shone like a disk of clear flame. Her eyes, dark blue, regarded him steadily, but with an inward sparkle, a widening thrill of enforced courage or of conquered fear.

"Good evening, Mr. Delaforce," she said gravely. "How do you do?"

Salem could see her only from the throat up, yet he felt certain the child was very small, and too old for her years. Her face—thin, pale under a first coat of tan—had a mingled look at variance with itself, both alert and sad, the look of a youngster who has run wild. Or perhaps the wildness lay in her hair, bright on the side toward the sun, bronze throughout the shadowy half, and all tangled.

"You're the first one," declared Salem, "to call me Mister anything."

She removed the dandelion, threw it away, and grimacing, rubbed its bitter milk from her lips. The action showed a thin little hand, rough with work, badly chapped.

"Why am I?" she asked.

"The rest of 'em," replied Salem, frowning, "call me nothin' but murd'rer. Been hearin' it all day. 'Le's go see the murd'rer.' "

The child seemed lost in meditation.

"Are you?"

Salem drew back somewhat, to give her a better light upon his worn, hairy face.

"What do you think?" he inquired.

While waiting he doubted if the child might not be a cripple. Her dark blue eyes, under their heavy and fine-curved lids, contained that deep beauty of thoughtfulness granted often to the eyes of the deformed. They looked through him, slow, impartial.

"No," she said.

Salem nodded at her quickly.

"No!" He repeated the word with delight, as if it were a thing to be proud of. "No, you bet you!"

They remained studying each other for a while, without speaking.

"Thank ye, little girl, for comin' to see a fellaw. You done me a heap o' good."

The sadness in her eyes had not altered.

"I don't know much." His visitor paused, evidently casting about in her mind. "I wish I did. But it does say, 'Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' "

Salem shook his head.

"You can't tell me nothin' about the rod," he

answered gruffly. "It's three-cornered whale-bon' pickled in brine, and laid on hit or miss. I hope you won't never come to feel it, young one."

After she had gone he regretted the speech; no use, he thought, in talking so to a child. But she had gone quickly, dropping with a "good-by," and running off. Salem hauled himself to the window, from one edge of which he caught, past the other, no more than half a glimpse of her. Not a cripple; she ran fast—a slight figure in black, taller than he had expected her to be—and slipped through the open door of a house across the way. He could see only half the house. It was a small, unpainted, slatternly building, banked round the sill, not with fir branches but with a trough of hemlock slabs and shingle shavings. The door closed.

"Poor little critter," thought Salem. "Her folks can't be no good. Tell f'm the looks of it. They'll leave their bankin' on all summer."

While he hung there he found to his great surprise that a change had taken him unaware. Something in his head, like a spring wound tight to the breaking point, had loosened and freed with a rush. The evening air tasted wonderfully sweet and fresh. Sunset flooded that dismal alley by the river, poured through and flowed over the ugliest

things in splendor. On the wharves lumber shone like pile on pile of gold, straight edged, clean as its own warm scent, and mirrored in the dark shore water that between wharves covered the mud flats with a still pool, brown as tea. Out in mid-stream lay the soft color of the sky.

He let go and sank back into the dusk.

"Maybe I'll swamp a ro'd out through this mess yit," thought Salem. "Tomorrer's goin' to be bad. But don't ye flinch no more."

He sat down, and thinking, felt sorry for two mistakes. He had driven Trapper away, when Trapper no doubt meant kindly; and he had forgotten just now to ask the child her name.

IV

He did indeed confront the next day without flinching. It was to be his second ordeal in the court room. On Monday he had watched the jury being impaneled and sworn, and heard Judge Knowlton, a white-haired gentleman with quiet, leisurely manners, adjourn the court over Tuesday, saying that he had to attend a funeral, and instructing jury and witnesses to be present at ten o'clock on Wednesday morning.

The hour appointed thus found Salem in the dock, composed, not hopeful, but willing to believe that truth might prevail. Or so he felt for a moment, until bad air, the buzz which followed his appearance, and the host of watching eyes made his head swim. The court room was dark and small. The oldest public room in town, it had been a church, built during the days when faith came first in clearing a village out of the woods, afterward outgrown and desecrated. Along the gray side walls high narrow windows rose each to a point in a two-foot-deep recess. Men and boys, their feet dangling above the crowd, stuffed these little alcoves tightly so that no draft

came in, though the lower panes had been swung open. Under the dangling boots all space was packed level with heads, close fitted, like black and white seeds in a sunflower. A thick, warm smell rose from old rubber matting in the aisles, a stale counter-irritant from old woodwork steeped in tobacco smoke. This might be the odor of the law, Salem thought vaguely, for as a boy he once had smelled it hanging about a lawyer's office. There were too many eyes for comfort. He tried to meet them, but they were too many, too fixed, and too hostile.

Ignoring them therefore, Salem looked toward the judge, who impended aloft, waiting and rubbing his chin thoughtfully with slender fingers. He seemed a venerable scholar at his desk, bowed down with the weight of this awful moment. As a matter of fact Judge Knowlton sat there tired, thinking of an old friend he had helped to bury yesterday.

The buzzing died away. The roomful settled into expectancy. His glance roving about the field of eyes again, Salem encountered one pair that wished him no harm. Midway in the throng, wedged uncomfortably, a vast, round old man wearing a mop of red-golden hair and beard, both somewhat grizzled, regarded Salem with a be-

nignant glare. He was eating what might have been an apple, but his big paw hid most of it. Salem had never seen the man before. He had a great chuckle nose, a wind-blown, weather-beaten air, and eyes pale and clear as a goat's. Next moment he gave Salem a shock by winking at him.

Through the crowded windows came, like elfin trumpets heralding the spring, a faint blast of cockcrow, repeated from barnyard to barnyard round the outskirts of the town.

Judge Knowlton folded his hands, looked up, and said as though resuming a late conversation, "In the case of The People against Delaforce, are you ready to proceed, gentlemen?"

Immediately a tall man in black serge rose from a table below the judge, tossed a lock of dark hair back from his forehead, and replied, "Ready for The People, Your Honor."

Salem viewed this champion closely after he sat down. He looked earnest and sombre; hungry hollows lurked underneath his cheek bones and jaw, and his Adam's apple showed like the breast bone of a plucked fowl.

"Observe," said the judge, "that the defendant has formerly stated that he does not desire counsel. Are you ready to proceed?"

Salem, who felt lonely and detached, found with alarm that everyone was waiting for him to answer the question. He cleared his throat. It was as dry as touchwood.

"Ready or not," he replied, "I told ye, sir, I didn't want no lawyers mullin' round."

"Very well, gentlemen," said Judge Knowlton, "proceed."

The effort of speaking at such length, for the first time in his life, before a crowd, left Salem bewildered. He saw the tall man in black rise again, and heard him begin with sonorous deliberation.

"Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury——"

What immediately followed was lost on Salem, who remained hot and cold by turns, dizzy with the labor of his few desperate words. In time, however, he grew conscious that the many-eyed monster was watching and listening elsewhere. Thought and sight returned to him. Opposite, not far away, sat two ranks of men whose faces differed from the others, being set, stiffened, like masks of unnatural wisdom or good behavior. He suddenly knew them for the jury. On Monday he had watched them gather one by one, and answer some question about prejudice, murder, circumstantial evidence. The tall man was

addressing them, though peering over their heads, as if his words to be collected were midges in the air, and his eyesight doubtful.

"—— that on the tenth day of Feb'uary the dead body of Asa Beard was found on the ice on Jacob-Staff Lake; that the body bore the mark of a heavy blow, dealt with some blunt inst'ment, above the right ear, crushing the skull; that near by was found an axe belonging to the defendant; and that the tracks of snowshoes in the crust leading from the spot where Asa Beard's body laid, were followed to a camp which was the defendant's domicile. We will also call before you, gentlemen, witnesses to prove that Asa Beard and the defendant quarreled, some time previous to the crime, and come to blows, over a dog belonging to the defendant; that the defendant openly threatened to kill Asa Beard on condition of a certain event happening, namely, if any harm came to his dog; and that this condition was fulfilled just previous to the murder. These are the bare facts. They are the facts which we sh'll prove."

Uttering his last word with force, the tall man turned aside, held up one finger and beckoned. His movement made Salem aware of another group in the crowd. This was no mob, after all,

but an ordered thing put in motion against him. Four men, their faces brick-red among the haze of paler town complexions, waited in a row. Salem at first thought them blushing with embarrassment; then he recognized them—old outdoor acquaintances, disguised in their Sunday clothes. One of them answered the tall man's finger and stepped up behind a brown railing, well polished by hand.

"—— and nothing but the truth," concluded somebody, "so help you God?"

Yes, it was all ordered. It grew solemn. This room hadn't quit being a church.

"What is your name?"

"Helon Fox."

"What is your occupation?"

"Lumberman."

This man's face, before, had looked out from a dyed sheepskin collar, over a sled stake, among snow-covered alders at Corporation House.

"Where were you on the morning of the tenth day of Feb'uary last?"

"Crossin' Jake-Staff Lake, sir."

"Were you alone?"

"No, sir." The red-faced man gave a gulp, seized the railing, and pondered. "No, sir; I wa'n't alon'. No."

"Who was with you?"

"Depatty Shariff Crosby was with me. And a bay hoss and sled belongin' to Bales McCatherine."

The dark champion of the people brought forth his next question very slowly.

"Did you discover anything laying on the ice on that date?"

"We did, sir," replied the witness.

"What was it?"

Mr. Helon Fox, lumberman, had no doubt what it was; with the aid of questioning he described it fully.

"Did you find anything else?"

"Yes, sir. In clearin' away to chop him out we found a axe 'longside of him under the snow."

The district attorney bent toward the table and handed over a light, single-bitted axe.

"Is this it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know it is?"

Mr. Fox became wary, turned the axe over in his hands more than once, then became cheerful again.

"Because the's his nishuals branded on the helve."

"You mean that those are the defendant's initials?"

"Yes, they be. He lent her to me one time. S. D. Them is his proper nishuals that I seen afore. S. for Sale and D. for Delaforce."

There followed more questions and answers, but the drift of them Salem disregarded, for as he heard Fox tell of bear's paw snowshoe prints, and of Sagamore's grave under the firs, room and talkers and listeners faded away. He sat in a dream, downcast, homesick, his mind far from all this evil, sadly roaming the woods. Once he looked up, recalled by the sound of his own name. . .

"Mr. Delaforce," the judge was asking, "do you wish to cross-examine the witness?"

"What's that mean, sir?" replied Salem.

He spoke without fear, being so remote. His heart was not there.

"Have you any questions to ask him?"

"No, thank ye."

Homesickness wrapped him round as if to hide him from view. Another of the sunburnt four mounted the stand; Crosby, the deputy sheriff, who had worn a black bearskin coat that winter afternoon. The talk went on, the same vain repetition.

"Was Asa Beard dead when you found him?"

"He certain'y was," declared Crosby. "A corp

some hours, and froze hard too. I've seen good many."

The next of the four, Pum's father, old Redman of Wing Dam, gave trouble by his vagueness. But he told a fair story, how on "Lambkill Hake last October, November mebbe, Sale there did fight with Asy Beard, no mistake . . . Yes, sir; that's a fact too. Sale did ondeniably, right out, promise Asy Beard to kill him some day, nex' time he ever attackted the dog."

When the fourth and last witness appeared, Salem felt a change like some breath of air. Pum Redman came lounging into confinement and took his oath like a shy, fierce young animal, half gawky, half graceful, that had wound from among trees into a circus tent, smelled things it hated, and would quickly wind out again. The light of his eyes drifted round to seek or give offense. Now Pum was a gentle soul; and Salem, knowing him, knew that here stood a hot, angry friend in the hour of need.

"What is your name?"

"Y'ought," said Pum, "to remember me pooty well by now."

"What is your name?"

"You go to grass!"

Hearing this defiance, Judge Knowlton sat up.

"Young man," he said not unkindly, "I call your attention to the fact that if you don't answer these questions you render yourself liable to punishment. You are called on to testify, and must testify, and if you don't the court will order you sent to jail for contempt until you do. By refusing to answer now you do no good to yourself or anyone else, but only hinder the course of justice."

Pum's face turned surly toward his examiner.

"What is your name?"

"Pomeroy Redman." He ground it out in a rage.

"Were you present at Lambkill Heath last October or November, when two men had a fight there?"

"Yes, I was. I was on Lambkill Hake."

"What took place there at that time?"

Pum was holding an inward fight of his own against passion.

"We all know what you're after!" he cried. "Yes, I seen Sale Delaforce lick Asy Beard good and clean and plenty. He knocked him ten foot through cramb'ry bog with one poke. And tolt him if he ever did that to his dog again he'd kill him. W'ich he deserved, the big ov'grown pismire—if he is dead!"

There came a pause after this outburst. The

man in black serge waited calmly, then took from his pocket a black leathern strap with a brass buckle and half a dozen brass bosses.

"Did you ever see this article before?" he said.

"Yes," growled Pum, "I hev."

"Where did you last see it?"

"They took it out of Sale's pocket when they 'rested him."

"Did you ever see it before that?"

"Yes, I did."

"When, and where?"

"Lots o' times. Round the dog's neck. Where s'pose?"

"On the neck of the defendant's dog?"

"Round it, yes."

The district attorney laid Sagamore's collar on the table beside the axe. He did so with a quiet air of content.

But meanwhile, behind him, signs of disturbance had risen. Looking where others looked, Salem saw a large, round back rolling away through the press, heaving people to one side and the other, moving in half circles like an up-ended barrel. It was the tight-clothed back and mop head of the old man who had winked at him, and who was

now evidently shoving his way outdoors in disgust.

"Pumps have sucked," proclaimed his resounding voice. "Jury? A bo'tlo'd of dodunks and chowderheads, wouldn't know a man if they saw him born. Look at 'em. They'll find guilty."

Judge Knowlton spoke from his bench.

"Mr. Bailiff, go get that man and bring him back here."

Many persons in the room guessed what was passing through the judge's mind. He knew this offender. Everyone knew and liked old Captain Constantine, a rich eccentric who, retired from the sea into a fortune, thought little of shore ways and would utter his mind aloud anywhere, contradicting even his favorite parson in church. Yesterday Knowlton had borne the head of a coffin with him, had seen tears in the captain's eyes; but now it was the judge, not the friend, that spoke to a culprit at the rail, whose arm was held by the sheriff.

"The court judges you guilty of contempt, and fines you two hundred and fifty dollars, and orders that you pay the fine forthwith or remain in the custody of the sheriff till the fine is paid."

Captain Constantine chose quickly. He gave the sheriff a brown derby hat to hold, as if hang-

ing it on a convenient peg. With one of his circular, muscle-bound movements, plunging hand and wrist down inside his tight coat, he struggled awhile, then hauled out a long, fat leathern pocketbook, dark and shiny as a saddle. A bright brown tarred spun yarn lashed this wallet securely together. Like magic the captain untied some private complication of knots, withdrew a strap from several keepers, flapped the cover open, wet his thumb, and peeled off one after another of fresh green bank notes, which he carefully shoved endlong upon the desk.

"Well worth it," he declared in a genial grumble.

"I warn you," said the judge, "to be careful."

The old irrepressible, tying his wallet and ramming it home again, looked quite unabashed and happy.

"Sir, for your court," he boomed, "I have nothin' but the greatest respect. More than ever. And for good discipline gen'ally. I make my apologies to all consarned."

He was allowed to depart, and did so, again swaying through the crowd like a barrel on its chime. Salem watched him go with a queer regret, as if this stranger were carrying away the

last of any good, anything to be hoped for or remembered.

"That is the case for The People, Your Honor."

Salem turned to find the judge looking at him, and saying as before, "Do you wish to ask the witness any questions?"

He had forgotten Pum, who stood chafing behind the brown rail.

"No, thank ye."

With that lanky wildcat grace of his, Pum slipped free of the law's cage and down among his outdoor fellows again.

"Have you any testimony to offer?"

"No, sir."

Judge Knowlton tried to do his best by this prisoner, whose haggard, scrubby cheeks and bronze profile reminded him of a young Job in the ashes, a Job who had renounced his Maker. The boy needed every chance.

"Mr. Delaforce, have you no statement to make?"

Salem wavered. He could not let his life go thus without an effort, but he did not know what effort or how to begin. This old gentleman's tone, some decency underlying the bare words, gave him courage.

"Yes," he replied. "I have. Think I have."

"Do you wish to make it under oath?"

"All right, sir."

He stumbled into the place where Pum had been, heard the clerk's voice and the name of God, waited, saw everyone waiting for him to speak, and grew bewildered, a man in a mist.

"On'y want to say this." He heard himself talking like someone else. "Up where I come from, no one ever doubted my word afore. That's true. Someb'dy stole my axe on me. I never touched him again, not after we had the fist fight. Never. If they'd read them tracks both ways, proper, they'd 'a' seen I come fresh up lake and found him layin' there, just the way they did." Salem felt the obscurity of his words, a tangle he could not clear away; his own mind saw plain enough the storm on the lake, and Asa's hair, a chunk of doormat filled with driven snow. "I can't seem able to put it right. They wouldn't 'a' found no tracks o' Beard. He was half covered a'ready."

Salem gave it up.

"Is that all?" said Judge Knowlton.

"Yes, sir, that's all. I jest mean to say, it don't hang together."

"Is there to be any cross-examination?"

It appeared that the district attorney had one question to ask. He rose, took the axe from the table, stalked near, and lifted the handle under Salem's eyes for inspection.

"Is this axe yours?"

"I tolt you afore," argued Salem, "somebody went ——"

"Answer my question, yes or no," cut in his adversary. "Is this axe yours?"

"Yes, it's mine."

"That's all, Your Honor," proclaimed the sombre tall man, and fell back, nodding to clinch matters.

The judge scraped his face down on both sides with the flat of his hand.

"Mr. Delaforce," he said, "is there any other witness you would like to call upon?"

"No, sir," replied Salem.

He found his way back somehow to the refuge of his chair. The judge's voice continued from above.

"Have you prepared any instructions that you desire to have given to the jury?"

"I have." The man in black serge handed up some papers.

Salem heard the same question put to him.

"No," he said. "I wouldn't know how."

Judge Knowlton regarded a stucco ring in the ceiling, a flyspecked ring round a hook coated with lampblack from some light of the church, long vanished.

"Do you desire to argue the case?"

"Most assuredly, Your Honor," came a stalwart reply.

"Proceed," the judge told the ring, "with your argument."

Upon the scene then—for Salem—entered chaos and old night. He saw the black champion rise with great deliberation and dignity, toss back the drooping lock from his forehead, blow his nose in a loud blast, fold away his handkerchief thoughtfully, explore the hollow of each wrist, and produce from each a cylinder of glassy linen buttoned with a moss agate, like armor for the back of his hands. Thus prepared, the man seemed a foot taller than before, gaunt as a moose. His voice became a bellow.

"—— no clearer case of downright, premeditated, cold-blooded murder in the first degree has ever be'n presented to a jury in a court of justice!" Like a roaring gale, the words left Salem overthrown; he could not follow their sense, but hearkened in a panic of unwilling admiration. "I will now pr'ceed to tell you how each and every

movement of the defendant has b'en clearly traced from the time he got up in the morning, on the day before the murder, down to the time when he was safely landed behind bars, where he belongs."

The storm gained headway, but now and again dropped in a lull, cold, unnatural, deadly.

"Gentlemen, I have no need to remind you of this man's motive for his turrible act."

The speaker lifted his hand, to display poor Sagamore's old collar, and wave it in a gesture of contempt.

"A dog! Nor do I need to remind you that many of the bitt'rest lawsoots in all history, and the foulest acts of bloodshed, have b'en committed on account of nothing more than a dog. Is it possible in any way, shape, or manner, for you, gentlemen——"

Salem's eyes took rest on the collar when it was laid down again. He did not even try now to listen, though more and more strange words beat upon him, burst round him.

"The attention of the whole civilized world, I may say, is leveled on this county, from which no capital felon has ever yet escaped the hangman's noose. The men of this county are red-blooded—no mollycoddles among them—they

will not be content with any compromise. Either you must find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree, as he clearly is, or else you must acquit him and bear that responsibility for the county's disgrace which will inevitably follow when the passions of an outraged populace ——"

There was more, but at last it ended. A stir of people shifting in their seats, a fit of coughing, passed roundabout the room. Judge Knowlton waited for silence, then spoke; and Salem learned with astonishment that the old gray scholar aloft sat quite unmoved, still as a rock.

"Have you any reply to this argument?"

Salem rose. Here in this cave of language and phantoms was one godlike man who did not despise him.

"I ain't no talker, sir," he replied. "The gentleman who spoke again' me is grand, but he's made a mistake somewheres. Been told wrong. He can shed words like—like—the way a carpenter sheds nails round a new building, but ——"

He meant this fairly, a serious compliment. It was taken for humor. Salem heard suppressed titters and saw faces grinning. The blood rushed to his head. Laugh, would they, at a man doing his best, who knew it wasn't much? He sat down in fury and despair, crying—

"Take it or leave it, I never touched him!"

"Is that all?" said the judge.

Salem nodded. He would never open his mouth to them again.

"It would appear, then," resumed Judge Knowlton after a pause, "that the taking of testimony is completed. The court will therefore instruct the jury."

He handled the documents which the man in black serge had given him, wiped a pair of spectacles, put them on, and for a long time sat reading and writing as though alone.

Salem looked at the dog's collar until the brasses blinked and made his eyes ache. Then he looked round the room, too tired to care if it were full or empty. At the rear wall, by the door, a tall stove and crooked pipe blotched the regular pattern of the crowd. He thought he saw, lurking behind them, someone he might have known. It did not matter. The judge was talking now. Words came to him in snatches.

"Burden of proof is on the state throughout . . . to prove the guilt of the defendant beyond a reasonable doubt . . . and if from all the evidence you have heard at this trial you have the slightest doubt as to the guilt of the defendant it is your duty to acquit him. In other words, it

is your duty to acquit him unless the evidence has convinced you of his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The court will further instruct you as to the difference between murder in the first degree and murder in the second degree. . . . And the court will further instruct you that by the law of this state, in the event that you shall render a verdict of murder in the first degree it will be the duty of the court to impose upon the defendant a sentence of death."

Salem looked up for an instant, then down again. His mind was not afraid of death, which would be better than this present thing; yet at the word some part beyond his mind or underneath it went numb, like an elbow hit on the crazy bone.

"And if your verdict shall be guilty of murder in the second degree it will be the duty of the court to sentence the defendant to imprisonment for life."

Salem remained in that tingling stupor, while the voice flowed calmly on.

"You are the judges of the credibility of the witnesses, and it will be for you to determine the truth of the evidence presented . . . wholly circumstantial, and if it does not as a whole convince your minds beyond all doubt that the de-

fendant is guilty you will acquit him. . . ." Judge Knowlton handed papers down to the clerk, while talking, and at last inquired: "Do you wish to retire, gentlemen, to deliberate upon your verdict?"

The two ranks of men opposite were bobbing their heads together, whispering. Salem could read in their faces a troubled importance. Among them there spoke up a mild little man with no hair on his head.

"I guess, judge, we'd like to go t' the jury room."

"Very well, gentlemen."

They shuffled out, sad and hampered, like men behaving at a funeral. An officer, the same bailiff or sheriff who had taken Captain Constantine's arm, closed after them a brown-painted door in the wall, and stood guard beside it under oath. Judge Knowlton, swinging his chair halfway round, plunged into a thought, a doze, or something deep and unhappy. Time went by; some boys, weary of delay, crawled backward off their window ledges and dropped from view into sunshine; and with the faint increase of light and air thus given, came drifting another spring challenge of cockcrow.

Salem outstared the brass bosses on his dog

collar. Let them blink as they would they were the last friendly sign of his old world, taken from him, shortly to disappear. Everything true and solid was melting in this region of words.

A knock sounded on the door, which the bailiff opened.

"We have reached a verdict," called a voice from behind.

Salem watched the dozen mournful men troop in. The clerk called their names one by one. They answered, "Here." "Here."

The judge swung back his chair to face them.

"Gentlemen, have you determined upon your verdict?"

"We have," piped up the little bald man.

"What is your verdict?"

That shining head became stage-frightened as the light was focussed there.

"We find the defendant ——" The foreman lost his voice.

During the pause for recovery, and each pause later, Salem had an impression, false probably, that all in the room waited thirsting for his blood.

"We find the defendant guilty—of murder—in the second degree."

Afterward he watched the clerk busily record-

ing this, heard it read aloud, and the jury answering that it was their verdict. He heard Judge Knowlton saying:

"Gentlemen, the jury is discharged. The court hereby appoints next Saturday morning, April twenty-fourth, at ten o'clock, as the time for pronouncing judgment on the defendant."

Twice that day the court room was to be disturbed. Of a sudden, quietly, Salem vaulted the rail before him, caught up Sagamore's collar from the table, and threw it over the heads of the crowd.

"Hey, Trapper! Ketch!"

It flew straight, though uncoiling, his final message to his own. He had seen Kingcome hiding behind the stove.

"Trapper," he cried, "give her to the little girl that lives opposite the lock—acrost from where I seen ye last!"

Charles Kingcome, who had evaded subpoena, did not shirk now. The collar met his broad palm in air and was engulfed.

Salem, vaulting back over the rail, stood at ease. No one else had found time to move.

V

Of Salem's life in prison the divisions had nothing to do with time. There were few landmarks in his calendar, and these few he saw only when long past them, as changes come and gone without meaning. Quiet inward changes; of outward, he kept no score.

The first week he remembered, because it flashed by in a mist, yet dragged half a lifetime, and because it left him wonderstruck, numb with surprise. He had expected vague horrors, of which he could form no picture beforehand—a plunge into the shades, the waters under the earth; but there came nothing of the kind, for after the claws of that public anguish had done tearing him he was dropped into a profound, still monotony which might almost have been peace. He found himself put to work in the broom factory of the prison.

It was a room not well lighted, but rather dim than gloomy, and filled with the pleasant smell of broom corn, the rustle of which perpetually made a faint, slow stir in the stillness. Revolving shafts purred, a belt lace whipped over a pulley and

snapped in rhythmical repetition, but these sounds ran hidden below the surface of a general whispering and hush. At times the light, padded thump of a machine also failed to break this quiet surface. Again and again in the days which followed, Salem could almost have thought himself in a barn, smelling hay and hearing the stamp of a horse. This was an early fancy, however, which he soon outlived.

He worked here for three years.

In the beginning he clung fast by hope. They had done wrong to put him here; they would soon find their mistake; therefore they would soon come, tell him so, man to man, and let him go. Who "they" were, he could not have told; but sometimes in thought he beheld them as a composite figure, vaguely benevolent, regarding him from somewhat above, like the judge. Meanwhile he had only to conduct himself as a man.

His work was light. At first he carried from storeroom to factory bundle after bundle of broom corn, sweet-smelling, tidy burdens, the end of each stalk tinged with a greenish dye that kept it fresh. A double armful weighed as nothing; forty-odd steps covered the distance to go and return; and having placed one load upon the long high table—glossy from the touch of listless

hands year in, year out—Salem had only to get another as deliberately as he chose. The dreary men sorting at the table did not encourage haste.

"Like bringin' fodder for the calf," he thought.

After some weeks he modified this view:

"Like bringin' bad fodder for a sick calf."

He had discovered three facts: the work grew heavier than lead, the smell of the corn stupefying like a drug; this apparent peace in here was a stale, rancid thing; and they, those people outdoors who were to right the wrong, had forgotten and would leave him here carrying straws for ever.

During the night which brought this counsel he thought he descended into hell. He was mistaken. It did not happen then, but afterward.

Next day a change of work brought relief, or what seemed relief at the time, if only as a fresh grip eases a broken blister. Salem took corn from the sorters and carried it to be bound. His journeys, no longer back and forth, took him over a more varied course, now near by, now farther away, up and down lanes of new faces not seen closely before.

Words were spoken to him, thrown at him by different voices: "Inside hurl here. Outside hurl. Covers. More inside."

Just how long these journeys continued, how many months, he never knew. He spent much time wondering at the faces, blaming himself because hardly one of them demanded him to know and like it better. They looked untrustworthy or dull or commonplace, or sometimes cruel, but besides a uniform pallor there was a trait possessed by too many, a lack in the eyes, that daunted him. Something was gone or had never been behind those windows of the spirit.

"They belong here, and I don't."

Salem rejected this thought as proud and unkind; but it often returned in other forms. These men were different, he knew. In the open air he never would have chosen them for companions; and here, though starving for talk, he saw none whose look crossed his own with the spark of honest fellowship, like catching at like. News and gossip ran underground as forest fire runs deep in leaf mold, but none of it meant anything to Salem. He did not speak the language. A man told him so one day with scorn: "You don't know a con from a p.k." There were, it is true, lectures and entertainments; but Salem wished neither to be lectured nor to be entertained. He desired only one thing.

A long time afterward he was put to work a

stitching machine in a dusky corner close by an end of the sorters' table. Above his right hand two long hanks of twine, one orange, one purple, hung down and made the only spot of bright color in the world. Here, thousands of times, he performed the same motion. Clamping an unfinished broom, round and witchlike, head uppermost, between the steel jaws of his vise, he reached for an end of purple twine, threw a neat half hitch round the corn, threaded first one, then the other of two great broad needles, pulled a lever, and watched the needles dart back and forth from their wire-screened concealment, alternately stabbing a row of stitches across the broom, till he checked them at the proper instant. He repeated this with orange twine; with purple again; with orange again; then removing the broom he laid it on a pile which rose beside his left hand and which presently a fellow prisoner came to take away. Salem could have done this work with his eyes closed.

Beyond his machine, and below, on a stool between the end of the long table and the wall, crouched always a little old man with bald head and purblind, squinting eyes. Nested in a litter of straw, where the shadow hung darkest, he worked by sense of touch, like a spider, with

cramped but skillful fingers all day stripping stems out of corn, for the finer grades of broom. This man had been there many years; his crime, a little neighborly spite work, arson. In the dead of a winter's night and of a cold forty degrees below zero, he had set fire to a house where women and children lay asleep. Now in the dusk his bald head shone glassy, pale yellowish white, as though it had taken the color of a broom handle. His sunken cheeks and loose evil mouth never ceased to writhe, pucker, chew on nothing, yet maintain a smile. Salem could not make out whether the smile, which lurked also in the downcast eyes, were crafty or vacant. As the old man worked he whispered, not louder than the rustle of the corn. Salem grew capable of hearing the words, at first obscurely, then with more and more distinctness, and found them always those of a filthy story or song. They had in them no touch of reality, no humor, nothing but such abomination as a parrot or a depraved child might learn by rote. Much of this, however, the creature plainly invented as he went along.

Old Deacon Kelly
With a cast-iron belly,
The inside lined with fat—

So the old man sang in his whisper, a beginning of endless, unspeakable fantasies.

Outdoors among his own kind Salem had often heard a spade called in fun something more hilarious than a spade; he knew plenty of rough talk; but he had never imagined that underneath plain smut there were depths and layers of sludge, or that age, and what was left of white hairs, could stir it round and round for pleasure.

The whisper, just piercing the rustle, made his day's work loathsome. At night those words ran through his head until he sometimes doubted if he had really heard them, if they were not rather of his own choice and making, or inspired by an unknown beast within him.

Night was bad enough, even when lacking this residue of the day. Salem's corridor window looked across an open space, perhaps a bit of courtyard, and over some roof, perhaps another wing of the prison, toward a patch of sky. It looked eastward, so that in clear weather he could lie there, and by adjusting his head on the pillow watch a star climb slowly toward the upper edge of the highest pane, become a short furred line of brightness, and die out; then moving his head, could bring it down again, and again watch it draw upward until he had fallen asleep, or that

star gone and another taken its function. Once a black thing, bat or night bird, startled him by swooping across and for a moment blotting this dreary pastime. It never came again, but it gave him afterward a nightmare in which he seemed to be outdoors, free, admiring the handiwork of the heavens, when suddenly from beyond the stars came a black pin point that rushed and grew and covered them all—a runaway world falling to crash and bring the end of this one. He woke in a doomsday helplessness.

But this was not Salem's usual dream or his worst. Another had invaded sleep, recurring as often as twice in a month. He always found himself walking among woods, in a fairylike season blended of all happiest times of year and hours of day, incongruous but lovely. Mist covered the lake, and far away loons were laughing; next moment in spring sunshine the water lay clear, pale blue, softly glowing, beyond a cove where the last melting slush made faint, splintery noises as it pressed together, dissolved and sank, while willows were budding in the warmest hollows alongshore. Or else he passed beneath October trees where broad yellow leaves twirled slowly down, and twigs of young moosewood, knee-high, had their long-eared tips in velvet, like so many

little buff-colored rabbits' heads. He moved with great ease and liberty, his footsteps buoyed in air, traversing a midsummer carpet of dwarf cornel without bruising one among all their red berries. He felt a luminous, unearthly joy. Then, miles away behind the trees, a bell began to tinkle. "Here it comes," he thought. The sound drew nearer. With it came foreboding, then recognition, then despair; and presently by one of those dream changes neither slow nor rapid, Salem was walking in winter through dry snow, an old man. He went on and on, feebly, without hope, driven by the wind or by the bell; the snow grew drier and thinner; he stumbled over rocks, half covered, that rolled underfoot; and these, at first black, he found to be turning yellow-white and rounded like bald pates. They were the bones of dead men. The world was a plain covered with them, and before him nothing but malignance, the desiccation of death.

This dream—when he fell asleep, the dread of having it; when he woke, its truth staring at him afresh in the darkness—this became his worst punishment.

One morning after it, as he stood at work, having just clamped another broom in his vise and taken the first half-hitch of purple twine,

Salem glanced up quickly as though summoned.

The whisperer in the straw sat idle, watching him. This had never happened before. Salem could not remember that he had even caught his neighbor's eye.

The loose lips were chewing, but paused to form a word:

"Wait."

Salem obeyed.

The old house burner gave him a cunning smile, nodded like one who read a face, peered under the sorters' table up and down the room with stealth, and meanwhile fingered something out from the side of his right boot.

"Here," he mouthed, and tossed the thing cleverly.

Salem caught and saw it for one of his own needles, broken, useless, though still pointed and some three inches long.

He stared from this to the giver, who once more smiled and nodded.

"Try that."

Salem could not understand.

The other leaned back in his nest, grinned, and suddenly with a fierceness that pulled the cords awry under his chin, drew his forefinger across his throat.

Salem recoiled. In those purblind eyes that had opened wide, full of fire, he saw the devil who came to answer his thought. They drooped and were hidden. The old man fell to work, stripping stalks from the corn, as always, only now he forgot to whisper and dozed as if content with himself.

Salem began a motion to fling the bodkin at him or away. Instead he paused, wavered, then stooping, ran it carefully down between boot and ankle.

VI

When Captain Constantine had elbowed his way from the court room on that morning so long ago, he stood at the head of the stairs alone and frowned. The street lay empty, in a drowse of spring sunshine and early noon. The captain jammed his brown derby hat over his temples as if the stillness had been a gale, and with sea legs apart, bent at the knees, remained motionless. His big eyes, that when alert could seem pale yellow and clear as a goat's, were darkened; retired under their bristling brows and among puckers of thought, they studied the ground below. Captain Constantine was lost in a muse.

The same fist which had left a dent in his hat now sought and found his watch guard. It was a braided cord of golden-brown hair, with gold mounting. At this he tugged very gently. Some instinct or habit made his fingers light of touch, as if they had encountered those of a child. He pulled out a broad silver watch, held it before him, and returned it to his pocket without a glance. All the while he brooded on the tracks

of last year's wheels, once iron-hard, now resolved into mud again, where the shadow of the courthouse lay along one edge of the road.

From the door behind, suddenly, there burst a man who hurled himself full force into the captain's back.

"Where goin'?" Old Constantine received the shock without a tremor and caught the man's wrist as he went spinning by. "Hold on."

It had been a notable collision, for this newcomer, though fallen one step downward, stood as tall as the captain, and even rounder.

"Le' me go!" he panted.

Though he pulled with all the advantage of gravity, of a good foot brace against the top stair, and of twoscore years or more, his wrist remained in hard keeping.

"When I was your age," observed the captain calmly, "I might 'a' been nigh as pow'ful as what you be, young man, but I wa'n't half so clumsy. They tried to give us manners too. We was taught, those days, to go quiet and shut a door after us, and not for to trompe down old men, women, and child'n. Not no more'n was necessary need."

This praise of former times, delivered without passion, took effect.

"Beg your pardon, mister," exclaimed the captive eagerly. "I was runnin' away. Never seen ye. Le' me go. I'm sorry."

He ceased hauling. Captain Constantine regarded him with mild interest. His face, vast and brick-red and freckled like a boy's, pleaded for escape.

"Between us, you and me," said the captain, "I guess we'd weigh into five hund'ed. Solid meat, the pair of us. And met solid." He looked down at his fellow giant's hand and saw in it an old dog collar studded with brass. "What's that?" he inquired sharply. "Rob the lawyers, did ye?"

"He chucked her to me. Salem. For another friend o' his."

The captain's eyes grew light, clear, and speculative.

"Oh! This boy in there?" He pointed backward, thumb over shoulder. "You a friend of his, too?"

Trapper Kingcome, nodding, began to pull at arm's length, but in vain.

"You bet I am. Le' go. I ducked out f'm under a suppeeny. He wants me to git away with this. Quick, 'fore they come."

Constantine did not let go, but turned and began leading his man across the platform at the

stairhead, thence round the corner of the building.

"You come with me," said he quietly. "I know the ropes of this town better'n what you do."

Among wagons and hitched horses and mud they picked their way through an inclosure that ended beneath a high fence overtopped with budding blackthorn. In a sunless corner lay snow, a fan-shaped remnant, coarse-grained, blackened, its edge thinning to gritty ice. Here the fence lacked a board. And here the captain released his hold of Trapper.

"If you can git through there," he said, "I can."

The gap in the fence was narrow for such a pair, and the snow gave bad foothold. Straddling painfully, with a rattle of buttons on wood, they bulged through sidewise, the younger man first, the elder next. They stood in a pleasant blackthorn lane and grinned at each other like runaway boys.

"What was it I called those twelve discon-s'lates yonder?" The captain removed his hat, punched out the old dent and a new one, stroked his mop of grizzled red-gold hair, and became lost again in reverie. "Paid high enough for it too. Can't remember. Jest what was that lan-

guage o' mine? It's kind of a gift. Come and go."

Kingcome suddenly beamed more broadly than ever.

"You called 'em a bo'tlo'd of dodunks and chowderheads."

"So I did!" cried the captain. "So they be!"

With a circular, muscle-bound movement he lifted his hat, grasping the brim with both hands firmly, and jerked it down close to his ears.

"I did so," he chuckled. "And by gravy, I'd pay out more to prove it on 'em." He suddenly forgot his mirth and gave Trapper a piercing glance. "Look ahere. Do you think that boy done it?"

Kingcome lowered his eyes, played with the dog collar, and waited before answering.

"I didn' know," he began, "but ——"

The captain snorted, or blew a blast of defiance from his great chuckle nose.

"Why," said he, "you're bad as them! Told me you was a friend o' his!"

"Let a man finish, will ye?" broke in Trapper hotly. "I didn' know then, but I stuck by him good's I could. It don't make no odds to me what a friend's done," he added with infinite scorn. One sweep of a freckled fist banished all mere deeds from the earth. "You think I'd turn

my back on Sale Delaforce for bein' in trouble? What's more, he never did do it."

With that Trapper turned and made off down the lane. His indignation kept him company; but he had not taken many steps when he found Captain Constantine walking beside him, quite spry for an old man, and benevolent in aspect.

"How do ye know he never?"

Trapper halted. His light blue eyes hardened with suspicion.

"I do." He became sulky. "Needn' fret you. Ain't sayin' how."

The captain waved that trifle aside vaguely, and smiled.

"Plenty o' time. They won't overtake us here," said he. "I'll set ye on your way, son, if you tell me where you're headin' for. So's you'll have no worries whats'ever."

Any old shipmate of John Constantine's could have told that when he gave up, changed the subject, and talked mildly of things in general, he was a man who deserved watching all day, if not many days to follow. At sea a Yankee in his crew had declared that the captain, when he couldn't hold a cat by the head, would hold her by the tail and get her skinned if it took from here to Chiny. But ashore people knew less of the captain, and

Trapper did not know him at all. So while these two burly gossips wandered down the lane, filling it from side to side, and amicably talking, there was a drift which only one of them perceived.

"Yes, sir-ree. Between us, we'd weigh into five hund'ed. Fo'ks would take you and me to be fat. And right there's where we fool 'em. Why, now, you as ye go must be a good two hund'ed sixty."

"Sixty-three," said Trapper with approval. "You ain't a bad judge o' flesh."

The captain nodded wisely.

"I tell by the wrist," he replied. "Ketched aholt of yourn, ye see. Broad enough for gambolers to shake dice on, and pooty nigh as thick. I do like to see a fellow critter solid. You can let on to look as fat as you like, but it's all dark meat, bon' and gristle."

Charles Kingcome fell into the net of this old flatterer, who used no more than truth, yet spread his mesh with honeyed art. By the time they left their blackthorn row and stood among wharves by the river, where hot noonday sun glared on the yellow piles of lumber, both men were talking away like old cronies.

"If it wa'n't no more'n to show the judge," muttered Captain Constantine darkly. "A man

o' good stout conscience, you are. I honor ye for that, boy. We'll trig his wheels for him. And you got bowels o' compassion, plenty. If 'twas only to learn Judge Knowlton there's more human nature knockin' round this world than's bound up yit in his law calf and red labels. Yes, sir-ree; you got enough to fill a tub, Charley. Good money paid out a'ready, and more where that come from. When you and me put our hands to it, Charley, we don't leave go till somethin' fetches away. Down opposite this lock-up house o' theirs, did you say?"

Ten minutes later a dreary little house banked with hemlock slabs and shingle shavings echoed throughout to a knock that was heard aboard ships across the river. A young girl dressed in black sateen opened the door and looked up timidly at a pair of huge strangers towering on the step. Her face, pale under a first coat of tan, and her large, dark blue eyes had in them the wildness and age-worn look of a changeling.

"Mornin' to ye, my dear," began the captain heartily. "Here's a friend o' yours, Mr. Kingcome, brought a little present for ye. Because you got more sense than most of 'em."

A terrier pup, all joints and paws, but milk-white, pink-nosed and sleek, bounded past her

from within, to flop and jump toward the strangers' knees.

Captain Constantine fell silent. When he spoke again it was to himself in a growl.

"Hosaphat, they feed the dog better'n what they do her! Here, Charley, speak up. Take the wheel, do your arrand. I'm stumped for words this time. Pretty, too, spite of all. Damn their lazy hides, whoever —— Don't ye mind me. Listen to him, my dear. A young one kept this way makes me let go all holts."

Trapper had his own method. He appeared not to see any frightened little face below him, but stooped, and holding Sagamore's collar in one hand, with his other patted the lanky and joyful young wriggler of a dog.

"Likes me, don't he, kind of? What's his name?" said Trapper. "Sagamore? What? Why, this collar belonged to his daddy. Well, well! 'Twould fit him too soon round the neck; he'd have to grow like Finney's turnip. I knowed your dog's daddy fust-rate. Name Sagamore, too. What's yours?"

VII

EARLY one morning when his dream left him awake before sunrise to begin another day, Salem stood by the wall opposite his bed. He faced into the corner. No man would do this willingly, by nature. Salem, driven into it, had left natural things behind him long ago.

He held with both hands the flat needle and felt its edges. They were sharp. The bodkin would perform.

"What's-name." He whispered, though no one could overhear. "What's-name. Eternity. That's it. For ever and ever. No more beginnin'. Quit all."

Time stood still, while his life ran like a thread paying swiftly from a ball which unrolled to nothing. What else passed through his mind is not known. If he wrestled with a black angel in that abyss of the corner, he was not once beaten to his knees.

"Git out! Plumb nonsense!" he argued, clutching at reason. "Eternity, hey? We're in the middle of her now, every man jack of us we be,

and she's open at both ends. How ye goin' to quit a thing like that?"

By the twilight, day was creeping near when he spoke.

"Can't be done. It won't hang together."

With an effort he snapped the needle in two, then turning, dropped the pieces and walked the length of his bed, back and forth, barefoot, noiseless, a ghost, but yet alive. His forehead was wet.

"Losin' my stren'th," said Salem. "That's a mistake; bad. Better keep what's left ye right along."

When he stepped up to his machine that day and took hold of work again, his neighbor the house burner gave him a squint and a pursed-up smile, half mockery, half question. Salem in return looked gravely from a distance, without emotion. The bald head bent to its task, the crabbed fingers moved as before, feeling among the corn and stripping delicately. There were no more looks or dealings.

At his next moment alone, somewhere in the twenty-four hours, a thing happened which left Salem astounded. In his cell had been lying—how long he did not remember—a small book. Salem had stared into it once or twice, but being

no reader had dropped and forgotten it. The thing seemed to be only people talking about their own affairs, which did not concern him. But now, at this very time, having picked it up without a thought, he happened on the words:

Chr. Well, and what conclusion came the old man and you to at last?

Faith. Why, at first, I found myself somewhat inclinable to go with the man, for I thought he spake very fair; but looking in his forehead, as I talked with him, I saw there written, "Put off the old man with his deeds."

Thus far Salem read standing. Next moment he plumped down on the edge of his bed, to read carefully, once more, twice more.

"Gosh! It's what I done myself!"

He sat for a moment as though stunned. Here, alone, he had met a brother who spoke to him. Someone had gone through all this before.

Salem thumbed the leaf, and began to devour the next page.

. . . So I turned to go away from him; but just as I turned myself to go thence, I felt him take hold of my flesh, and give me such a deadly twitch back, that I thought he had pulled part of me after himself. This made me cry, "Oh, wretched man!" (Rom. vii. 24). So I went on my way up the hill.

Who was this talking?

"Me?" Salem wondered. "No, I can't talk so good."

And who was this other living soul who came

through a door, shut and locked, to ask news of him like a brother? Salem fluttered the pages backward till he saw a picture of a man lying on a bed much like his own; a man with a jug and a book upon a stool before him, a stone wall behind; a big-boned man in knee breeches, with large mouth, firm-set nose, his head on a rough pillow, and his quick bright eyes looking straight out. Below the picture began printed lines. It was this big-boned man who spoke:

> As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream.

Salem drew a long breath, raised his head and looked strangely about the walls.

"Why, so do I."

After the word "Den" someone with pencil had drawn a star, a curved line from it into the margin, another star there, and written: "Bedford jail."

The reader sat awe-struck. This was, then, indeed his brother; his own flesh and blood had come to tell him—what?

"Lord," cried Salem, "and me a poor fist at readin'!"

Time, give him time, he thought, and he would wade through this mystery. Then remembering,

he laughed his first laugh in years, a short but good one, which delivered him from evil.

"Got the rest o' my life for it, if nobody don't come take this book away."

From now on, at every moment which could be called free, Salem read. Often it was hard going, his way full of stumbling-blocks, thorny words, the pain of his own dullness; but again, and more often, he escaped these and went forward with delight. All day at his machine he thought of what he had read, and wished the hours away till he could plunge once more into this new world and continue his pilgrimage. After any hard fall he went back always and looked at the picture of his brother, who somehow never failed to rise, take him by the hand and lead him farther until the path went smooth. Salem no longer cared where his body might be. The rest of him was out. This book had made a traveler of him.

One day the person who had left the book appeared. He was known to Salem as "a little, sober-lookin' feller," quiet, of middle age, with hair turning gray, and not much authority. He had always found Salem polite though indifferent; so now he probably felt surprise when met with a glare.

"You hain't come to take it off?"

"No," said the visitor. "Not to take anything. But what did you mean?"

Salem pointed at his book.

"Smilytood of a Dream," he answered. "They was a little girl told me once about a rod and a staff. I didn't believe her then. Do now. They is both. You hain't goin' to carry a man's staff away? I'm a awful slow reader."

The visitor, going through his duty, tried to have no favorites and no aversions. He had seen this young man moving among the others, dazed like a country horse led through crowds; he had watched this young man's face change from good red brown to the pale hardness of Roman cameo; but until now, when Salem grew talkative, he could not have said whether he wished or dreaded to make better acquaintance.

"You like John Bunyan?" he asked.

"That his name?" cried Salem. "You bet ye! So many names amongst 'em, I never made out which was him."

There followed a talk, and afterward other talks of such length and nature as rules permitted. This visitor, however much he may have believed the soul of a man to be his affair, had too much sense to meddle. He brought other books, of many kinds, and let his beginner choose. Per-

haps he was content one day when Salem, looking up suddenly, in the midst of an argument whether "trout or pick'rel et better," exclaimed with great conviction: "They is such a thing as castin' out devils! Don't let nobody tell you different." The visitor made no comment. He left behind him Lorna Doone, Sam Lovel's Camps, The Cruise of the Casco, and a more laborious little tome bought with his own pocket money, a pronouncing dictionary.

"I dunno how to say words right," Salem had confessed. "I see 'em here and sound 'em inside my head, but they git all balled up like a hoss in damp snow." He now added, "Thank ye, sir. I'm a-goin' to learn how to punnounce."

The visitor went away pleased but saddened. Salem bending over the dictionary, his lips moving, all his muscles urging the work, resembled too nearly some figure of a man reading music who would never play or sing, never hear voice or instrument.

Yet Salem learned, and always put his learning as far as he could into practice without delay. Once he read of a man who walked round the edge of a table on his thumbs. Next moment Salem put down that book to study his hands. The place contained no table fit for experiment;

but by some freak in an old and badly planned building, there ran along one wall a narrow ledge or jog, about three feet from the floor. Salem rose, to set his thumbs on this.

He lifted himself, strained hard, and then toppled.

"Can't be done."

He tried and failed again and again, till his thumbs were livid, wealed, the nails blue, and aching as if burnt. At last he faced about, panting, and spoke to his unseen rival.

"You let on you skunked me?" He wore a grim smile. "Show ye 'fore long. From now on I'm goin' to git back my stren'th." Then he paused, and corrected the speech. "Git—get. Get. Stren'th—strength. To get back my strength. And more too."

Thus began a peculiar but rigid course of training, which never afterward flagged and which had for its aim nothing less than the perfection of every sinew in a man's body. It would take time, but time abounded. Salem, having drawn up his own rules of discipline, became both slave and driver. Like all of his kind, he knew many traditional feats of strength, old "bon' twisters," muscle grinders, tricks "to keep ye on the stretch, soople as a cat," which could be performed in-

doors as well as out; he invented many others, odd but searching trials of the human frame; and week by week, month by month, long after he could go on his thumbs the full length of that ledge and return, the driver kept the slave at work.

One evening, when it had grown almost too dark to read, Salem found matter of offense in a book. He had never done so before.

"Why, this man's a liar!" he exclaimed. "Damn whinin', dirty liar!"

He clapped the volume shut, and with a flash, a blind wrench of anger, tore it halfway in two as a conjurer tears a pack of cards.

"Sho! No sense your doin' that," he thought.

He put down the mutilated book, and sat regarding it for a moment, ashamed, but overcome by the ease with which he had done this damage. Then he rose, to stand thinking.

"You could prob'ly—probably take any man in this place and break him acrost—across your knee like a dry stick."

There was truth in the figure. But while he mused, any pride or vanity was lost, whirled away changing in a sudden fierce desire.

"Break one of 'em. Chance will come. Break the right one at the right time, and run for it."

Salem had often felt the desire, but not as now. It coursed through him like flame. And at that hour someone without chose to jingle the keys, unlock and open his door.

A well-known shape was entering—a burly man, square-shouldered, in uniform.

Salem took one step toward him.

"Not now," said the man quickly. "For God's sake, don't!"

They paused. It was dusk, but the man's hard face betrayed emotion—something like fear, yet not fear for himself.

Salem retreated, sat down, and took his head in his hands.

"I couldn't touch ye," he declared bitterly. "Can't even do that much."

The other stood watching him, then spoke.

"That's better. Now stiddy, boy. I was afraid you'd spoil your luck then. Right when it's come to you. Good noos. You get up and come with me."

VIII

Two days later a grubby little man in a grubby little shop, the sign of which informed a back street that here second-hand goods of all kinds were bought, sold and exchanged, met one of the surprises of his career. He was dealing with a lone customer, a pale, dark-eyed young man who looked like a foreigner and who spoke with care, haltingly, as if he had learned English from books. This foreigner proposed to sell everything he stood in from top to toe—a new hat which was never designed for his head or face, a new but ungainly suit of clothes, and boots to match. The dealer foresaw profit with plain sailing.

"Is that your best offer? It don't seem no—it does not seem very lib'ral—liberal."

The dealer smiled a sweet Oriental smile.

"You haf misunterstood me," He murmured. "Dey are new, yes, but de suit is poor mateer-yal. I could not gif so moch. It vould not doo. I did not pwonounsse good. Vat I tol' you vas ——"

With an air of long-suffering repetition he abated his offer by more than ten per cent.

Then came the surprise. This foreigner dropped his bashful dignity and became a native.

"You lie like Sam Hyde," he drawled quietly. "Ye pindlin' little Portagee, you, think ye can take back words by making fritters of 'em? You talk plain enough when ye like. Now jes' turn to and rense the batter out your mouth, take a long breath, and say 'hemlock' to onhitch the jaws; then open up, holla, and stick to whatever comes out. That is, supposin' we're to trade."

This advice, given very mildly, performed wonders. The pair drove an even bargain, with good humor. Soon afterward the young man, transformed in a dark blue flannel shirt, brown moleskin trousers, and moccasins, said good day and was answered with respect. The moleskin pockets contained a little money, to boot. He had entered the shop as an awkward stiff-jointed lounger in misfit finery; he slipped outdoors like a lean young hunting dog bound for the woods.

His moccasins were machine-made; in a former life he might have scorned them; but now, after that clumping footgear he was just rid of, they bore him along like magic shoes with wings. In

an hour, at any rate, he left the town five miles behind him.

Salem went bareheaded. He got no hat in his trading. Though it was midsummer there could not be too much sunlight on his face.

The second evening of liberty found him encamped by a brook. All round lay quiet farming country; he had not yet seen real woods, only groves or fir lots among low hills; but here by the stream hazels and alders made a tiny green wilderness which, as he sat cross-legged near the embers of the supper fire, encompassed him with a forest-like stillness and depth. The sun had set. Above the fresh green leaves glowed a patch or two of sky, against which the last dayflies, a fine-sifted whirl up and down, were madly ending their dance. In lanes hidden far off the cows had stopped lowing.

"If I don't wake up, now!" said Salem, half in earnest. "Too good to keep."

He desired to forget these few days just past, along with many others; but here he sat, looking now into the embers, now at the current browner than alder bark, recalling the warden's office, the warden's face and words. A pardon from the governor; that was what the man had said. Salem would never know what the warden had thought:

how strangely this youngster heard him out, looking him straight in the eyes, uttering not one syllable, keeping a face unmoved except for a flash of indignation.

"Their pardon?" Salem had thought then, and was thinking still. "Theirs? They ought to ask mine."

Well, he was done with that world.

"Let's not remember it," said Salem.

He sat listening to the brook, which lay here in a pool, but which somewhere above ran down gurgling among roots or stepping-stones. He drank in its music and its mingled evening perfume.

"You can fairly smell the minnies and shiners down under."

A moment afterward, none the less, he was remembering again. He unbuttoned a pocket in his shirt and brought out a wad of paper, doubled flat. This, unfolding, became a thick envelope. There was light enough to read by.

"For Mr. Salem Delaforce. His Property. To be Handed him when he gets Out."

The handwriting Salem had already pored over, many times. A bold fist, using plenty of ink and a broad pen, it was unknown to him. Salem turned the envelope over, to shake its contents out.

A leaf of plain paper, bound with faded red tape, was wrapped round all but the ends of a flat parcel. The ends were clean bank notes.

"For a Starter," the same unknown fist had scrawled across the wrapping. "$250. Plenty More where This Come From."

Salem could not guess where; he had given up guessing; and now, as before, he studied the handwriting in vain.

"Well, I know where it's going to." He buttoned the thing away almost angrily. "What they take me for? Whoever they be. Plenty of haying to do all along this ro'd—road. Slats of it."

His fire, a handful of coals on the grass, had died while he sat thinking. Salem rose to stretch his legs. Below him on darkened water the evening foam began to drift, ghostly bubbles that before morning would slide together in cakes of froth. He stared down at them, wondering. Silent things like these had gone on, all the while he was away, and he had forgotten them.

"Bedtime," he told himself.

But another forgotten thing caught and held him motionless—the silvery beat of crickets in warm hayfields thrilling the twilight.

"Them, too. Clean gone out of mind."

Salem remained there long, hearing them and

watching stars come over the black tree tops. When at last he lay on his well-made bed of leaves, yet another sound startled him, ripped the veil still farther off his memory. It was nothing more than a nighthawk that dropped overhead, a whirr and twang like the tongue of a jew's harp setting teeth on edge; but that swoop left him plunged in thought which went down to the bottom of remembrance.

"If I don't come awake and find —— If it don't ring—the bell."

He shivered and sat up. His head brushed the ceiling of boughs. Reaching by starlight he caught a hazel leaf, and pinched it as one might pinch the ear of a child. It was there. He knew the soft roughness.

"All right."

Salem lay down again, heaved a great breath, and let the singing of the crickets drowse and dwindle.

He woke before dawn, swam naked among the cakes of night froth on the pool, breakfasted, cleaned camp, buried his fire in sand, and departed leaving no other trace of human stay. A wonderful chorus of birds in the roadside elms accompanied his march, and before sunrise, when the birds fell silent and began their visits in dropping

flight from tree to tree, Salem had covered a good two miles. He did not hurry, neither did he rest until the way grew hot. Thus day after day his journey continued; in camp at sunset by still waters, out again at bird song in the morning. Whenever the look of a farmhouse pleased him he turned up the lane, asked for work, and was put to making hay. The farmers who hired him, and his fellow workers, thought the new man something of a riddle, but liked him one and all.

"That young furriner," said one, "don't waste no time baingein' back and forth; he kerries his swath, and goes it like J. I. C."

"Yis," agreed another, "looks poor as a snake, but seen him turn to, pitchin'? That boy, I'll bate ye, c'd outlift Mose Craig, dead weight."

"Never opens his trap," declared a third man, "but I vow he ketches a joke quicker and laughs heartier'n two folks."

As for Salem, though unaware of this praise, he rejoiced in their kindly company. His heart was enlarged. Sometimes he worked with a lump in his throat, the sense of restoration moving him almost to tears when he heard some cheerful country saying pass among his mates or only the rustling ring of scythe blades that swung in unison. But though more than once a farmer offered him

good wages to stay the year round, he shook his head.

"After this job, sir, I must be moving on. Got to—got to go meet somebody up yonder."

So, earning his way, regaining hard health, Salem tramped northeastward by pleasant summer roads. His face turned from brick-red to a clear brown, his eyes had not so often the look of one who hearkens for something behind him.

On a hot forenoon he climbed a ridge that seemed homelike, and as he went down its other slope, emerged from young firs to overlook a valley that also was like home, though at first glance bewildering, wrong end to. Salem knew the valley well, but never had approached it from this side. Green meadows, their boundary lines of old rail or tumbled stone broken and smudged by wild hedge growth, ran broadly down to where at the shallow bottom of the landscape a river sparkled, and a town, little houses gray and white, straggled under a clump of elms. Flags, colored specks, hung in the town. Past it the river, bright blue, wound among fields, yet everywhere was checked, held in patchwork by log booms, crowded with square turrets, wooden piers aged to the color of granite and overgrown with choke-cherry bushes planted by birds long ago. Falls hidden in

the distance tumbled and hissed with a sound like that of frying.

Salem's inner man gave a shout to the gods, for this river came winding, he knew, from his own place. His outer man did nothing but look in silence, then remark: "Don't seem to figger why they ain't working. Not Sunday. I can't hear the saw. No prettier sound if 'twas going, the saw."

It was holiday in town. Salem entered the street and was carried along, wondering, in a crowd. Bunting covered the shops, with tormented paper festoons of tricolor. Arches, gay though temporary, shone and trembled overhead in triumph. A band of music was playing. Women and girls in white dresses moved as though such creatures had always been round, every day. Salem stood marveling at them, until pushed on.

He backed into an eddy and found time to ask a man who leaned in a door, "What they celebratin'?"

The man removed a cigar from his mouth and looked vaguely over the crowd.

"It's a sentinel," he explained.

Salem drove on with the current, abashed. He felt his ignorance, for the reply meant nothing.

Farther along he took courage to ask a mild old farmer who came pressed against him and clung for support in passing.

"A centinerary, they call it. Town gov'ment's a hund'ed year old t'-day, or there'bouts. Literary programme and games goin' for'ard. A centannual, bub."

Someone else had not fully grasped the meaning of this revel, for a huge drunken man fell through sidewise, knocking people about, and whooping: "Hurrah fer the Fourth o' July!" And he gave the firmament a hair-raising piece of advice, what to do with Queen Victoria.

In a moment Salem had him by the neck, quietly shaking his head off.

"Behave yourself."

There were screams. Then the man went by, sobered or frightened, without another word. Salem took his own course again, to get through this fair at once, cross the bridge and follow the river bank; but holding a purpose, he could not stem the crowd which held none, and so had made little way when three men overtook him.

"You a Britisher?" their spokesman asked.

They were all strangers.

"No, I ain't," said Salem. "But the queen's a

good old lady. That fellow forgot himself. Women round."

The stranger nodded.

"You handled him elegant." They began talking all three together. "Look a-here. We need a wrastler for the next game. Joe Courtemanche says, the big, lazy, good-for-nothin'— A purse o' fifteen dollars. You come along. We need a man to wrastle uptown here."

"I never did for money in my life," Salem objected.

"Then you come do it for your country," they replied. "For Hail Columby, happy land. Courtemanche says the town's a hund'ed year old t'-day, and he'll throw anybody in it over the moon. Says we're all run to pigweed. . . . No, we hain't scairt of him, but —— He's waitin' there now, a-grinnin' and claimin' the purse. We non' of us kin handle him, that's all. Don't want to see foreigners walk off a-laughin' at us, do ye?"

While Salem regarded them doubtfully their leader broke forth again: "W'y, you ain't afraid, be ye?"

The crowd was watching them and listening.

"No," said Salem again, "I ain't."

"This way, then."

The three closed round him, forced their passage to an open door, hurried through a shop and a warehouse, then along to a deserted alley. Salem as he went expected to find some quiet knot of connoisseurs, gathered to watch a neighborly bout in the corner of a green field. He had wrestled thus, once or twice before. It surprised him when his companions or guards turned quickly into another back door, through another shop, and forth, battling with another part of the same crowd, to an open space, the very centre of all.

"Now ye kin shut yer head!" cried his leader. "Here's our man."

Shingle shavings carpeted the road; a ring of people inclosed him, men, women, boys, a horse's head among them, a red jacket or so with the gleaming brass tuba of the band, now silent; and like water in rapids a great babble of talk poured round him, dashing his thoughts to confusion. Here he stood, public, alone. He had stood thus only once before, at his trial. Salem gave a start to turn, checked it, but felt his knees quaking. Across the clean shavings a man looked up, eyed him, and laughed.

"Dat leetly tall boy? Ah'll can see he was 'fred now, me. Das too bad, keep me waitin' here too long tam for joke, yes, sah!"

The speaker, a dark man, short but enormously broad, laughed again, tossed his black curls, and continued to suck a lemon. Already that day the great Courtemanche had been fighting, for blood smeared the lemon and his thick black mustache. He had also been chasing a greased pig, for his canvas jacket shone as if buttered. He wore this garment very tight over his huge chest, and a padding of sponges in armpit and on shoulder exaggerated his mass, deformed it like gnarls. His wide brown face, glossy with sweat, beamed all good humor, yet the good humor, Salem thought, of a man who had things his own way.

Voices, close behind, underran the general hubbub.

"Who's this other furriner?"

"Dunno. They jes' come and hove him in by the crop."

"He looks scairt to death."

"Ought to. He's in for it. Hell to pay and no pitch in his kittle."

"Yes, sir-ree, he'd ought to. Joe Courtemanche'll take and snap him in two like an aidgin'."

Someone had spoken true. Salem acknowledged that much: he was frightened. This

crowd would be like the other. No foretelling the kind of trouble they'd bring on a fellow.

"What's your name?" A neat little man in Sunday clothes came bobbing up with a notebook. "I'm the judge o' this contest. What's your name?"

Salem told him, and while he wrote, whispered anxiously in his ear: "Look. I ain't got to say anything, have I? To them?"

"What? What?" snapped the judge. He seemed to dance with heat or excitement. The book and pencil trembled in his hands. "What's that?"

"Have I got to do any talkin'? All I'm scairt of."

The little man stared.

"No," said he. "Why, no, not unless you want to. Nary word." He screwed his mouth round like a buttonhole, and from one corner of it added: "All you need do is break his pesky neck. If you're able. Big tub! Roarin' like the Gulf, what he kin do round here. The big bellerin' gype."

With that the judge skipped away, held up one arm, shrilled forth some very different language, impartial and lofty, then drew aside. Courtemanche flung the lemon skin playfully after

him, laughed, ran his fingers through the black curls, then moved forward crouching. He held both hands out, low, grinned against the sun, and talked a stream of gibberish as he came. Salem stood waiting.

At last the bulk, swaying like a bear, was close enough. It left the ground and dove with a joyful yell. Shavings flew.

Most of the onlookers failed to understand the next thing they clearly saw. After the first rush and whirl both men remained upright where they had met. The tall youngster was holding Courtemanche by the shoulders, at arm's length, looking down into his face quietly, as though about to give him advice. Their attitude seemed almost peaceful. It did not change, till Courtemanche lowered his head and began twisting his whole breadth, to no purpose that anyone could follow.

Jeers of disappointment went round the ring. "Wrastle! Why don't ye wrastle, you two?" But those who knew better, said nothing; and one by one other men began to guess, when they spied rags of sponge and canvas underfoot. Things had come loose, but not Salem's grip. The wrestlers did nothing because he chose neither to move nor to let his adversary move,

except for the clumsy writhing. Moments passed. From these two central figures a queer stillness radiated, so that rank after rank of the crowd became silent; whoever could see was watching; whoever could not, straining on tiptoe to learn what had gone wrong inside there.

They heard Courtemanche only, puffing, cursing, as he joined his fists and drove them upward again and again, to wedge Salem's arms apart. The wedge failed.

A man laughed; then another beside him; then a third across the ring from them; and some aged critic who spoke in a toothless whistle but had good eyesight, demanded: "What is this, you, a laying on of hands? Ye big-headed hornpout, that boy kin hold ye there all day."

Laughter became general. This public, having heard and seen the vainglory of Courtemanche a moment ago, took pleasure in finding him ridiculous.

"Throw him over the moon, hey? Waitin' till she's come full, Joe?"

A small boy, made bold by example, shouted what he would not have dared, until now, to breathe: "Hey, Jozeff! Quiddlety? Goin' home 'fore suppertime? Pea soup and onions!"

The helpless champion's face grew dark red.

With a swoop, a lightning shift of hands, a bend, clutch and heave in one motion, Salem had the man aloft.

He loved a mighty laugh, but not at himself. Again he strained; the deadlock refused to break; and then casting away in fury what was left of a good reputation, Courtemanche bent his head sidewise and bit like a dog, setting his teeth in Salem's forearm.

Next moment, with a swoop, a lightning shift of hands, a bend, clutch, and heave in one motion, Salem had the man aloft. For what seemed a long time, everyone expected to see the great body, poised in air, go whirling to the ground and smash. A woman who spied the look on Salem's face gave a squeak of terror. Then she with the others became aware that he had paused, wavered under the burden, changed his mind, and begun to smile. His hands flew to another grip. He lowered Courtemanche carefully, head first.

The wrestler's black curls bored among the shavings; for Salem held his feet and walked him three times round like a windlass before easing him down from the vertical to the horizontal. It should do Courtemanche credit that when he sat up, with chips in his hair, in his eyes, and in the fresh blood on his mustache, he tried weakly to join the merriment.

"Bah gosh, ah guess he was the dev'l" said Courtemanche. "No sah, ah'll don't want no

more, me. One tam he'll be plenty, bah gosh!"

Salem, grinning and embarrassed, had meanwhile worked his way into the crowd. It opened to let him pass, but after him streamed a little mob of noisy adherents, thumping his back and clamoring.

"Quit that, will ye, boys?" he implored. "Jest let me go through here quiet." No man wanted such a tail to his kite. This upper end of the street rose toward the river bank, where above jostling heads loomed the gray timbers of the bridge. If he could once get free, across there, the town might go on well without him for another hundred years.

"Here. You wait." The three strangers who had caused all this annoyance, the little skipping referee with his note-book, and a sweaty man in scarlet who carried a brass trombone, fought for the honor of leading him. "Come take your purse."

Pushing, dragging, they got Salem into a canvas booth that smelled of cigars and trampled grass.

"Here's the boy!" they called. "Here's the winner for ye! Stood him on his head. Fork out!"

"A neck-and-crotch holt it was."

" 'Twa'nt neither!"

"'Twas so!"

"I tell ye I seen it!"

"Hand over the purse!"

In turmoil and close heat Salem found two more strangers bothering him. They wore holiday black, stood behind a counter of pine boards and bunting, added compliments to the confusion, and solemnly gave him three pieces of dirty green paper.

As they did so a bystander spoke out.

"W'y, by Godfrey, I thought I knowed him all along! That's Delaforce the murd'rer."

It was a big, saturnine, discontented man who uttered this, in a complaining voice. The booth had grown still when Salem turned.

"A haley old pass things has come to now'-days. Givin' prizes round to murd'rers."

Before the whine had ended Salem flung the money on the grass and walked out. He stopped short at the entrance. Wondering faces watched him. No one supposed that as he halted, alone before their eyes, he was wrestling with an enemy greater than Courtemanche. He threw and won the fall, unseen.

Turning, Salem went quickly back, stooped, and picked up his money from the bruised grass.

"Thought he'd need it after all," said that

whiner who knew his name. "Guess ye do, to rights."

Salem unbuttoned the pocket of his blue flannel shirt, took out a stained wad of envelope, opened this, folded his unclean winnings away, read the inscription—"For a Starter"—and tucked it all into his bosom again.

"Yes," he said, "I got a use for it."

With that he stepped across the booth and eyed the discontented one at close range, without passion.

"Yes, I need it," said Salem. Taking hold by the nose, he wagged the man's head harmlessly from side to side. "But there's worse needs than money. You ain't a man. What people like you say don't count."

Not caring to watch a sallow face turn pale or red, he set the nose free, nodded good day to his paymasters, ducked beneath a clothesline row of flags, and was gone.

All the fun of the fair buzzed after him. It sank, the river cooling and quenching it with gurgles under the bridge.

IX

To SAY that he disregarded the tongues of men had been easy; but when time drew near for Salem to follow his own words and live by them, he found it hard.

He was resting, a figure of peace, by sunset water that burned with clear yellow flame through a meadow. From where he sat the bright green banks ran level for a while, then seemed to float suspended between glow of air and glow of water, then made a black bar across the west. Whenever Salem dropped in his fishing line, ripples broke the inverted sky below him, widened their circle, and sent gray smoky rings running down the trunk of a young poplar on the opposite shore. Nothing else moved in all the landscape; even the poplar leaves hung without a sign of their turncoat waggling; and Salem, whose cast of the sinker had created this brief stir, remained quite motionless while it died out and the striped undulation became gray bark again.

He fished for his supper. Hornpout, eel, or

chub, no matter which took the bait, would be welcome. A small iron pan lay on the grass beside him, with firewood ready. But Salem had forgotten supper, forgotten his appetite.

"I can't do it." The calm which flooded these meadows, this unearthly radiance, was illusion. A black conflict went on. "I can't do it. Worse'n the toothache to spoil all. I can't go it."

He had struggled through that fair, left the town behind, a good day and a half of marching, yet now he sat and heard the voice in the booth. It whined at his ear.

"And that fellow was the only one to know your name there," Salem told himself. "Where you aim to go, you fool, down where they took to work and tried you, every man jack'll be saying it. Pointing you out."

Behind him, he knew well enough without turning to look again, an old guidepost leaned at a fork of the road. Its arms had dropped askew, directing travelers toward Mother Earth, right and left. Both arms were gray and riddled with bird shot; but flakes of paint, traces of lettering, ghostly words from another generation, still proclaimed if only as a whisper:

"9 Miles to Wing Dam.
48 Miles to Crossport."

The worn-out post loomed like a gallows tree at the back of all his thoughts.

"No, sir. You can't outface 'em. Nine miles. Right up to the edge of the woods. Your own country. The other way, down— no. Them? You had to lay hands on three men inside an hour, to town. I'd rather go live with the skunks and lucivees."

A tug at his line and a whirling pull brought some moments of relief. He fetched up an eel, and was busy. But having got unsnarled, having cooked, eaten, cleared away supper, and lighted his pipe, Salem felt once more the presence of the ghostly alternative behind him.

"You won't down, you old sir, will ye?"

He rose, walked to the foot of the guidepost, and stared at it through the twilight. The lop-sided relic offered him his choice, right or left, north or south, without comfort.

"All is, a man can't stop, hey? Past they go," said Salem aloud. "Father must have seen you, many's the time. Since your young days I guess a lot of us has traveled where you're pointing, down below ground. Most likely grandfather saw the paint fresh on you."

Dusk fell, the light withdrew from air and water, the decrepit wooden stump glimmered

above him and began to melt from view, like his tobacco smoke that drifted past it; Salem waited as if consulting an oracle; and presently the hour, the symbol, or the names he had invoked, gave him a sense of watchful company. Those who had trooped past the lonely cross-road in other years, now were gathering to see what he would do. Salem had his answer.

"Nine mile short and easy?" He reflected. "No, sir. Father wouldn't go that way; nor grandfather. The long and hard, if it's got to be so."

He gave his mind no leisure to change, but made at once toward the stream, groped together his handful of belongings on the meadow bank, and was off, tramping southward. By starlight the road, a short band of mist, unrolled from darkness that was now cool open air, now trees warm and sweet with the last breath of daytime.

Two hours after midnight Salem halted.

"Twenty-odd miles out o' forty-eight," he reckoned. "Harder to go back than 'tis for'ard, now."

He camped on a dry ledge among hackmatacks, and fell asleep watching through their dark vapor the bright vapor of the Milky Way.

The rest of the journey he took at his own

gait, from noon till nightfall, from dawn till after sunrise. A morning whistle blew as he came downhill toward the town. Early light covered a green sea of elm tops, green motionless waves, and like tidal rocks in every hollow, gray roofs here, a white gable there with green shutters, a broad, low red chimney sending up the smoke of breakfast; above all two white church spires, and on the taller of these a gilt cockerel crowing in pantomime between the gilt letters N. and W. to warn shadows that already streamed away. The river, clear gold bordered with melting brown, upheld a few dull shining lines, pink and orange masts of old schooners, against dark fir woods on a hill not yet climbed by the sun. Salem eyed all this doubtfully. The place of his trial he had pictured, beforehand, while marching on it, as hostile; now it seemed both lovely and indifferent.

"A fool's arrant you come on," he said. "Errand."

He slipped into town by a back way among outbuildings. Only half a dozen persons were in sight, and these went about their morning affairs with no more than a glance at him. But as he passed a long gray shed that hummed with the music of the plane he saw across a yard

full of chips a large man in faded blue, who leaned bulging through a doorway and had begun to stare open-mouthed.

"Hi!" The man shouted, waved both arms wildly, and came running. "You!"

Salem knew at once the heavy body that moved on such light feet. It was Trapper Kingcome.

"Signs an' wonders! You ole swamp angel, you!"

Round-faced as ever, spattered with freckles to the roots of his pale coppery hair, Trapper blocked the width of the road and caught Salem's hand.

"You ole Nick-o'-the-Woods, you! How are ye?"

Salem laughed. He had been afraid of this meeting. No need: they shook hands as if never to leave off, and the shining of Kingcome's light blue eyes outdid any words.

"Good gorry, Trapper! You ——" Salem's own eyes blurred. He choked, could not speak, and dared not try to, overcome by the hold of this freckled hand and the grin of this workman in dirty clothes. Every best part of life seemed to rise together from forgotten depths and stifle him with joy. "You—why, last time —— And I hove a bench at you!"

"Come in," said Trapper, "out the sun." It hardly shone over the mill, underfoot the chips were still damp, morning coolness lingered everywhere; but Kingcome spoke and led Salem along as if guarding some delicate thing that might wilt. "Mus' go feed my old boiler."

They entered a shed or dark wooden vault half underground, sweet smelling, filled in one corner almost to the roof by a great yellow mound of chips, crisp and curly. These came blowing downward from a boxed hole near the ceiling, and amid them in long gusts the clean high barytone song of a plane running through clear stuff without a chatter.

"Don't mean to say you're working?" Salem regained the power of speech. "Who routs you out of bed in time?"

"Me?" cried Trapper. "I'm Gabriel-Blow-Your-Horn. I'm the cherub that wakes up the seventy times seven sleepers. Didn' you hear the w'istle blart jes' now? When I git me a good purchase on the ole cord, and histe both boots off the ground and hang there to finish my beauty sleep, boys-oh, the fo'ks go shin up trees f'm here to Piskehagan. Think she's a Injun devil."

As they faced each other, Salem on a keg, Trapper elbow-deep in shavings, they might have been

mistaken for dull young men exchanging time-worn banter. No one could have guessed, at any rate, how Salem was thrilled.

"Ain't this a hell of a note?" demanded the grinning Kingcome. "How'd you git here?"

"On foot."

"You're lookin' fine."

"You haven't changed a mite, Trapper."

They shouted, for the vibrating music drowned their words, as if they sat within the body of a giant fiddle. Kingcome did not go near a boiler anywhere, but presently rose, took a broken hay-rake, and began to haul shavings down the slope of the yellow mound. It was plain that he performed needless work, plain that he, like Salem, felt the embarrassment of emotion.

"Oh, guess I hain't failed non'."

"How are all the boys?"

On this question Trapper laid hold with grateful energy. He plunged into his answer, forgot to rake, sat down again, and in half an hour, talking at speed, had only disentangled the preface and laid historical groundwork to his news of the country side. He was a master gossip, Salem not a bad listener.

"Half a jiffy, don't feed her out too quick." Salem at last halted the chronicle with a sigh.

He looked slowly about the room, hearkening to the shrill plane, watching the chips blow from the chute mouth, relishing their fragrance, admiring the soft golden twilight reflected from a patch of sun at the door. "I'll bust. Good mind to get down and roll like a horse. You know, there where I was, Trapper—I've been a long time starving."

At his words the broad freckled face became grave. Its roundness could not lengthen, but it wore an infant's look of distress and appeal.

"I know," said Trapper. "May as well come to the p'int." He stopped, then broke out passionately. "Sale, you must think I got a heart no bigger'n a beaver's tongue! But how could I write to ye? All that while I kep' a-tryin', time and time again, but set there dumb and tore up. You may not believe it, when a man's jaw kin wag so like Sancho, but come to letters I wan't no more fit to write 'em than what hell's fit for a powder house. And that's a fact. S'posin' I could, what use was letters anyway? Like goin' up attic to show a hoss an ear o' corn out the window! Ontil we did have somethin' to tell, and then too late; you was gone."

Kingcome stopped short, mumbling in confusion.

"I never once thought of that," declared Salem. "Never. Nor nothing else like it." He had broken the ice now. "You know," he continued, "they let me out on what they call a pardon."

His friend looked up, still flushed, but no longer vehement.

"They told me," said Salem, "in their office, 'twas an Obadiah Voe that —— Was it our old Frizzly?"

"Yeah." The other cut in quickly. "Old Frizzly Voe, he done the deed. With your axe. He went and give Asy Beard a tunk that started the whol' thing goin'."

Trapper had heaved on foot and was raking once more.

"How'd they find out?" Salem demanded. "Last man on earth. Obadiah Voe? The poor old string of misery, what drove him to it? They said he owned up when dying. Trapper, look here. What's become of all those young ones Frizzly was father and mother to? Good gorry, he had 'em like the sands of the sea."

It appeared that Trapper would look anywhere but here. He went on combing the mound. His pale blue eyes had grown small and hidden, like the eyes of an elephant.

"I can't jes' tell ye, Sale. I did hear somep'n too. Obadiah's children are bein' well looked after, they say. I don't jes' recall the partic'lars."

Unless the world had changed, this huge talker remembered all he chose not to forget. Salem sat wondering. At last he gave up the subject, and chose another.

"Did you ever go see that little girl?"

"Which one?" said Trapper.

"The one I chucked you the dog's collar ——"

"Oh, her! Yes, I give her the collar same day."

Again Salem waited.

"What," he ventured, "what you s'pose became of her?"

Kingcome fished after something in his dirty blue pockets.

"Why, she's round," he drawled. "She's livin' there yit, I guess."

The talk came to a standstill while Salem conquered another doubt.

"I don't know, Trapper," he began shyly. "Maybe a kind o' fool's caper. But I took the notion I'd like to see that child again and—and have a talk with her."

"Child? Oh. Yeah, I see."

The sleepy, elephantine eyes did not glance up,

but considered what one freckled hand was now holding, a nub of blackjack tobacco gnawed all round, fluted at the edges like a pattypan.

"I'll tell ye who you'd ought to have a talk with." Kingcome tore off a chew and ruminated. "You'd ought to go see Cap'n Constantine, that's who. He could tell ye ——" Trapper suddenly roused. His eyes opened, wide and earnest. "Look, Sale, you go talk to the old cap'n. He's sick, layin' bedfast, and would love to see ye. You'd take to him like a duck's bill to the mud. Will ye go? Will ye promise?"

The man seemed ready to implore. Salem could not understand his fervor, but nodded.

"All right. I don't mind."

"Don't ye fergit to." Trapper threw away his rake, puffed out a sigh of relief, dropped on the mound elbow-deep once more, and became his old cheerful self. "But to think you never heard o' that hoss! Why, sir, as a colt Bales McCatherine willed him to Tom Grele. And now, by ginger!—Bales died in a hoss blanket, as he always 'lowed to, and wouldn' have his boots took off. Tom set up nursin' him nights, and nothin' would do, his last night on earth, but bring the colt right int' the harness room where his eyes could rest on him. 'Mambrino blood,'

s'e, 'keep him good. If they'd let me lead him int' the next world with me, Tom, I'd pay the dooty.' So sayin' old Bales reaches up for the halter, but can't make it, and his hand drops, so-fashion."

The interrupted chronicle swept on, full tide. Salem heard of great deeds done by a horse, now famous, that when he himself went to prison had not been foaled. The pair of cronies made up for lost years.

X

It was late at night, the town had gone to bed, before they ceased talking.

"Quit long enough to sleep; haf to, I cal'late," Trapper admitted.

They stood in the road before his lodging. Salem took another last look at the darkened houses and the broad starlight over their chimneys.

"Funny," said he, "to think of being scared of this. They don't seem just real, though, yet. Like coming home, but coming home another person. No. Well, words can't hit it off. Good night again."

"Good night."

Yet Salem lingered with an afterthought.

"Trapper, ain't it a caution how a man's made to guess right sometimes?"

"You mean like what?" demanded Kingcome.

"Well," Salem returned slowly, "take it like guessing which arm of a guidepost is which."

He left his friend mystified, and went off to make his bed out of doors. The night remained

warm. Salem had had enough of four walls when they were not needed.

Next morning by bright sunshine he sought and found a little street once hateful to him. It led between river wharves and a huddle of abject sheds, the disorderly hinder parts of buildings long sunken to neglect. He remembered every stone, every warped gray shingle that hung scaling off, or nail half drawn by frost, or crazy window-sash patched with old shooks of boxes; for though he had passed them not often, he had seen them all with the eye of acute misery. Now, as he went down, it was like a way of lost footsteps. Nothing would have drawn him there again but the purpose which at the fair had made him stoop after dirty money, and at the cross-road taken him south. To turn his head this morning and look toward the jail, cost him a painful effort.

There was no jail. Salem stood for a moment lost.

"The lock-up's gone."

Chickweed, plantain, and burdocks overgrew a square depression in the ground, where heaps of broken plaster crumbled into ruin that seemed already ancient. What had been a place of darkness lay open to the sun.

"Red cow's hair in the lime," thought Salem. "Must have been about here, my room."

On the spot where he had first known agony, a tall sour-dock upheld its pointed clump of seeds, brown as iron rust. Salem regarded this weed for a time. Though not given to day dreams he brooded, overcome by the truth of his midnight saying to Trapper. Everything had changed, flown, melted away, his own sufferings along with the rest, like the pangs of a man dead and forgotten. Here he was, another person: back from nowhere, a ghost looking at weeds.

He woke with a shiver, glanced quickly behind him, and stood hearkening. His face twitched.

"No," said he. "No."

Nothing sounded anywhere but a rumble and slap of lumber loading on some deck.

"Maybe her house is gone too."

Salem turned, ready for more vanishings; but there across the road below him waited the small house that he had come to see. Dreary, unpainted, askew on ground sloping toward the river, it was the same, its foundation still hidden by a trough of hemlock slabs filled with sawdust.

"Told you," he chuckled, "they never burn their banking."

He went across to it and knocked at the door.

If the little girl answered his knock he would say and do just what he had planned. His thoughts had long been homing to this doorstep. He was Mr. Delaforce, and she the one who had not only called him by name but believed him when he had sat like the Man in the Iron Cage and believed nothing. Now, while thanking her, he would try to make her understand, if a child might, what had lain hidden in his breast ever since.

"No good at telling things," thought Salem. "But out with it. A few words."

Then he would say good-by, leave her a present, and come away. The pocket of his shirt was unbuttoned, the envelope at hand, with his "purse" won from Courtemanche and his larger windfall.

"Not much to do, either," he complained. "But it's all I've got."

Below the end of the house, where the road curved steeply down to a wharf, men were loading a vessel. While he waited Salem took an idler's pleasure in the sight of work. It was a green schooner, the Galilee, that floated on a sunshiny blur of her own hue and resounded with hollow thumping as the lumber came aboard.

"Short maisure, every stick of it," quoth Salem.

"For some Latin country port, then. And they call her Galilee!"

No one had come to the door. He knocked again. Soon afterward he grew conscious that among the workers below one had stopped and was watching in return. A tall, strongly built young man, on a golden pine platform which raised him halfway up the foremast of the vessel, he stood clear against the blue, and forgot a heavy plank slanting over his shoulder. He stared.

For a moment Salem thought he knew this figure of arrested motion. Then he was not so sure. The man's red face, puckered with the strain of looking toward the sun, recalled a face that had peered at him thus with difficulty before; but when or where Salem could not tell. River bank and brown dock water made an interval too wide for the tracing of lineaments.

"Ought to know him, though."

One fact appeared certain. This long stare was not friendly.

"Hey, there!"

The watcher on the lumber pile took a fresh grip of his plank, and shouted.

"Nobody in!"

His voice had a known but not a familiar ring.

It was hard, bold, and like the man's face, unfriendly.

Salem called back to him:

"Anyone live here now?"

The other suddenly fell to work again, sliding his long yellow plank over the edge of the pile, over the string-piece, and so down till its butt rested on the deck of the Galilee. He then spat between wharf and bulwark, turned away, bent, and lifted another plank.

"I dunno," he grumbled with a sour oath. "An' if I did, ye dumb ——"

Salem could not hear the rest. He waited, but the stranger said no more, and took no further heed of his doings, except to scowl across now and then while working. For a third and last time Salem knocked at the door. He gave ear more closely. Inside the house a clock was ticking. He heard the scratch of a dog's toenails on the floor, and soon afterward the snuffle of a dog, questioning him through a crack at the threshold. No one else came.

XI

He would try again, concluded Salem, and perhaps find her in the evening, after supper. Meanwhile time lay heavy on his hands; the prospect of wandering about town all day dismayed him; and when suddenly there popped into mind the promise he had made to Trapper yesterday, it was almost a welcome thought. He had no desire to call on a stranger. This one might prove to be an inquisitive old busybody, full of questions, a torment. Still, his word had passed. The man, whatever else, was a friend of Kingcome's, and old and sick.

"Let drive, and over with," said Salem. "No worse than twiddling thumbs all day."

Not long afterward, therefore, he opened a gate in a tall hedge of lilacs overgrown with cinnamon roses, and reluctantly faced the house which had been pointed out to him as Captain John Constantine's. A large white house with green shutters, it stood well back in retirement behind old twisted apple trees and huge maples. Toward it there led a long straight path of pink gravel, neatly raked and bordered with outlandish pates

of brain coral set among ribbon grass. In beds, a rank on either hand, peonies, hydrangeas, none-so-pretty, bleeding hearts, and flowers of which Salem did not know the names, grew thriving as if well tended. Both house and garden seemed aged, serene, clad with dignity in a garment of tranquil sunlight and green leaves.

Coming from poverty's door by the river, Salem felt somewhat daunted.

"Must be an old nabob," he reflected, "to keep all this up."

The front steps were painted French gray, spatter-worked in black and white, all freshly done, even to the curled horns of the boot scraper. Two noble white pilasters flanked the door. At the base of each lay a giant three-pointed shell of the holy-water clam, scrubbed white as alabaster, and filled to the brim with clear water.

Above one of these fonts a card held the inscription:

"KEEP FULL FOR BIRDS.
PER ORDER, J. C."

The knocker was of brass, fashioned like an urn and a wreath. It bore no name. Salem, not without misgiving, lifted the wreath and rapped.

A nabob who let birds drink almost in his

house, the young man reflected, must be a quiet little person of mouselike ways. It confirmed his theory when the door swung half open, and clinging to the edge as though blown there by some draft, a tiny dry wisp of mankind, in loose dark clothes, with a beardless, nutcracker visage, blinked sadly upward from a height of less than five feet.

"Captain Constantine," began Salem.

"No, I hain't," snapped the nutcracker. "My name's Orin C. Cook, if ye want to know."

This information came out so brisk as to leave Salem taken much aback.

"I mean," he exclaimed, "does Captain Constantine live here?"

"Maybe he doos," replied Mr. Cook; "then again maybe he don't." On this doorkeeper's head a thin crust of dark hair seemed glued to the scalp. He fingered it cautiously, made sure all was there, and added, "You that young foreigner with the dollies?"

"What?" said Salem.

The other exploded.

"Dollies!" he cried in a passion. "Doll rags! Able-bodied, and peddlin' doll rags for to stuff underneath dinner plates on table, by jibbers! What next?"

"No," rejoined Salem. "My name's Delaforce. They told me to ——"

From a spitfire the little man suddenly turned to the meekest of lambs. He opened the door wide, swinging himself back with it, and beckoned.

"Come right in, Mr. Delaforce," he said with alacrity. "My mistake. Set your hat down here. Oh, you don't wear none? My mistake again. Come right on upstairs. You be'n waited for, I tell ye!"

Mr. Cook began skipping up a fine old staircase with mahogany rail and spiral banisters. Mounting after him, Salem felt very dirty in this grand house, where gilt frames hung shining on every wall and polished brass carpet rods gleamed at every step.

"By jibbers," whispered his guide, "lucky you wasn't! Dollies? What cap'n said about dollies —cracky!—looked's if the roof'd go flappin' like both lids to a Noah's Ark, yes, sir! He did so!"

In a cool, dusky upper hall that smelled of cedar from some chest or linen closet, the little man took breath, cast behind him a grin of encouragement, and straightway crossing to a door, tapped lightly.

"Mr. Delaforce here, sir."

"Show him in," rolled a voice of thunder, its

volume growing as the door opened. "And, Seacook, you run down to the galley and put the kittle on."

Next moment, propelled by a gentle but disconcerting shove, Salem entered the room of the thunderer. Mr. Cook shut him in at once. It was a large, high room with white woodwork, marvelously clean, full of sunshine and a play of leaves round the open windows. A few pieces of San Domingo mahogany, brown, glimmering, solemn in deportment, and two long deck chairs of varnished rattan with fawn-colored pillows of Madagascar cloth, left abundant space everywhere, yet took the eye with contrast like summer and winter.

"Good mornin', young man. Si' down," rumbled the voice. "Good mornin'. I consider this oncommon kind, sir. Afraid you'd give me the go-by."

Salem faced about. In the corner beside him lay, or sat abed, the man who had spoken. Propped on a mound of snowy linen, his round body cased in a flannel jacket no less white, his dusty red-gold hair and beard shining, one who was not a stranger looked up cheerfully, nodded, and went on eating an apple. Salem had never forgotten the broad weather-beaten face, the great

chuckle nose, and brown eyes clear as a goat's. This was the old unknown who had winked at him in court and paid a fine there for brawling.

"Si' down, boy, si' down."

Salem, in astonishment, obeyed.

"Have an apple."

A litter of books covered the bed, a toppling pile of books at the man's elbow threatened a reading lamp and a tall silver dish heaped with apples. Among the bedclothes came a roll and a fling, and an apple shot into Salem's lap.

For a time no more was said, the caller not knowing how to begin, his host continuing to regard him wisely between large bites. The bedposts ended in carvings, ancient brown goblin heads of the four Evangelists, who appeared to watch Salem and outstare him.

"Don't seem to have done you no great harm," observed Captain Constantine at last. "Look fine as a glass fiddle."

So saying, and without change of posture, he threw his apple core across the room. It sailed in a long curve exactly through the middle of an open window and dropped into the green-gold shade of maple leaves. For a man in bed, the throw was a feat. Salem admired it. The old man chuckled.

"Try that yourself. Go on," he urged. "Go on, try it."

Salem finished his apple, an early Snow, as he guessed; too early, as the pale seeds told him, to be eaten by an invalid.

"Go on, chuck. Never mind the walls, boy. Heave her sittin'."

Salem threw carefully. The core struck below the window frame and bounced back along the floor.

"Thought so!" cried the captain in triumph. "Too anxious to git there on the fust ground hop, like all you young generation. What they call your traject'ry, too flat. Now look ahere." In three bites he demolished another apple, and poising what was left, took aim. "Slow and easy. P'int high fer the middle of the upper sash. A droppin' fire. P'rabola. So-fashion." He repeated his trick and laughed. "There's the whol' art of firin' apple cores outdoor from bed. Plenty o' time to learn, being here 'in unrecumbent sadness' like the cows.

"I've had enough of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John's company." He nodded at the bedposts, and chose yet another apple. "The doctor'd have a cat fit if he knew, s'pose. But these are all good win'falls and worm-ripened. When they hain't I take and meller 'em on Matthew's top-

knot. A good apple never hurt good man yit. So far's that goes, you couldn't kill me with an axe."

At this word the captain stopped short, choked, reddened, and in anger or consternation smote his fist down, making books jump on the counterpane.

"James Rice, there I go both feet!" he cried. "The last mortal thing that ought to come into my all-fired old jackass of a mouthtrap! You'll have to excuse me, son," he stammered in painful distress. "I always go hurtin' folks' feelin's this way."

Salem, when he began to understand, laughed.

"All right, sir. Don't you fret," said he. "I never did it, ye know. All that's over with, and no feelings to injure."

Captain Constantine gradually took heart.

"Guess you're right," he murmured. "Guess you're right." Subsiding, he lay thoughtful, and when at last he spoke again it was to the four Evangelists. "A good, well-bred boy. Said so, fust time ever I laid eye on him."

Their odd contest, the captain's large, careless method of discourse, and his abrupt fall from boasting to humility, had won Salem's good will. He felt at home in the room. This praise confounded him again, but not for long; it was the

first word of any such kind in years; and as no more followed, its effect was warming. He watched the massive figure of meditation, the big worn face, promontory nose, and hooded eyes, all as rudely carved as the bedpost heads, yet like them strong, alive with droll benignity. The mop of hair billowed outward above the ears, rejoicing to escape as it were from a ring of permanent pressure. Another man could have worn this only for what it was, the mark left by a tight hat; but the captain's head might have been bearing a crown, and not unworthily. So at any rate Salem fancied. He liked that head.

"No feelin's to hurt, hey?" rumbled the deep voice. "Good. Fust-rate. The clear thing. A haley old time you must 'a' had though, son."

Captain Constantine opened his eyes to fix them on Salem with a look friendly but doubtful.

"Don't you mind me," he said. "An old codger with his brain a little mite cracked, that knows it when she takes to cuttin' up didos. Ye see, it's like this way. At your age I'd gone deep water many's the voyage. Forty-two years at sea. Twenty-eight of 'em in command. Married late. Two child'n.

Fust a daughter, then a son;
Then the world is well begun.

"No feelings to hurt, hey?" rumbled the deep voice. "Good. Fust-rate. The clear thing."

So they say, and by Godfrey, so it does appear to hold true at the time, no mistake. My little girl and my wife, looked —— H'm. Yes. They did so. I can see 'em well, with the sun on their hair and dresses, like, in the garden. Not this devilish big shebang here. The small one, our garden patch we rented. The baby, he'd 'a' been about your size by now.

"Well, come to my last voyage. I was the kind of man—there's a lot like me—could make money for the owners but not himself. I worked like a good one too. We'd always figgered to buy us a little resting-place and be together, which if it's asking a favor don't seem greedy, but somehow we never got enough ahead. Then one day, when I was in Chiny, master of the Moonglade, come news my wife was left house and land and slats of money. Some old aunty she'd never more'n seen up and willed it to her out of a clear sky. Good forch'n's thunderbolt. My wife writes it all, and s'she 'Better come home, John.' A happy letter, 'twas, about us and the child'n. I had the Moonglade packed with cargo tighter'n a Bolony skin, and we cleared and put for home. She was a long-laigged ship, more wind the better; it blowed your hair off most o' the way, and we walked her along like sixty, boy. My last voyage,

I kept thinkin'. All went as smooth as the cat's tongue round a saucer. 'Twas great days, my last at sea."

In this narrative the captain showed his only sign of age; he paused from time to time so long and with an air so final that Salem thought he had ended. Now he fell silent and gazed at the window, as if alone.

"I come ashore here," he broke out suddenly, "to enjoy our blessings with 'em, the gift o' the gods. And lo you, they was gone, all three gone. A month afore, my wife and girl died the same week of the same trouble. And while they was down, the household on its beam ends, what does my little son do but —— Ye see, the hired sick-nurse heard him talk about going to meet his daddy. She thought it was jest talk, but the poor infant went and clumb in a bo't, to row out to Chiny, with them hands of his which their clasp couldn't more'n meet round your thumb. She upsot. They found the bo't and oars."

The speaker looked toward Salem again, and nodded.

"There. Ye see. Don't know why you sh'd get this outpourin'. The's men would have let go all holts, dropped flat down, and when 'twas past, come up whol' and sound. But these doin's

—call 'em the Lord's or call 'em the Old Boy's —I fought 'em; fought 'em hard, like a hard man, and my brain cracked right there. I know it as well as you, and humor it along. So don't take no offense at what an old sculpin like me says or doos. A man that hath great riches, settin' soul alon' in a houseful of jooby-joos. They come yisterday and tried to sell me some dollies, I hear."

Captain Constantine laughed, and reached out a muscle-bound arm for another apple.

"Now let's hear something," said he, "about your own troubles."

It was a fair exchange; but Salem sat pondering and discovered that he had none. This tale out of the past drove away his own troubles, put them to flight and to shame.

"How'd they treat ye down there to prison?"

Five minutes ago Salem would have thought the question impertinent. He tried hard to answer it now, but gave a lame account, chiefly of the man who had come to let him out, and of that man's great unexpected kindness.

"A tough old customer as ever was, yes, sir, and scared, for fear I'd lay hands on him and get kept in longer. By his face you'd never 'a' thought ——"

To Salem's relief, came a rap at the door, and Mr. Cook, bending backward, overladen to the eyebrows, drifted in with a huge tray of dishes.

"Here, here, Orin Seacook, what's all this?" bellowed the captain. "Think a young gentleman would want his victuals in my bedroom? You take him downstair. Mr. Delaforce, you'll have to excuse me, but the stewart'll feed you right, or ——"

"These are yourn, cap'n," said his little retainer meekly. "Them of his is below."

"What? Hey? Humph!" The captain's wrath went off rumbling. "Why couldn't ye say so?" He knocked a layer of books to the floor. "All right. After you've et, young man, come on up and have our talk out."

Thus it happened that Salem took his noonday meal in a large and rather sombre dining-room. He sat alone, but from a tall sideboard under the lee of much silver and britannia ware Mr. Cook stood watching him. The food was more than good. He did it justice whenever the little man slipped away.

"Cook!" sounded a roar from above. "Cook, bring on the dessart!"

"Cap'n," shouted the watcher in a high voice,

with a prompt serious air, "there hain't no dessart!"

"Then, Cook, bring back the beans!"

Not a line moved in Mr. Cook's withered face, but plainly he was enacting some old stand-by jest; for when he drifted sadly out he bore a delicacy that seemed to float upstairs before him.

Salem again did the meal justice. Over the fireplace a black marble clock, like a costly tomb of time, stifled the minutes trying to hammer their way free. Woodbine leaves flickered at the edges of a window, where against the sunlight a full-rigged ship, berthed on a writing desk, lifted her spars and cordage, pennant and dogvane higher than a man's head. Her gilded scroll contained the name Cathance. Another ship filled an area of oil painting on the wall, the Raven's Head, flying signals to a diminutive Peak of Hong-Kong behind her. While Salem viewed these objects he encountered the gaze of Mr. Cook, who had silently taken post again.

It was an altered gaze. It seemed friendly. In fact the little man stood eying him now with favor, and spoke.

"Cap'n's better," he said. "You done him a heap o' good. Al'ays does, anyone he takes a shine to, and backs."

This news had a welcome sound.

"I took one to him," declared Salem heartily. "You bet you! He's a ——"

Epithet failed him, but the other caught his meaning, and suddenly broke in, whispering fiercely, reddening with the joy of one who shares a pent-up secret.

"You no need to tell me! Not a word!" hissed the little man. "Many's the year I sailed with John Constantine. By jibbers, I know him to sea, and I know him ashore!" Mr. Cook drew near the table, clung to it, and made it tremble as in vehement undertone he sang the captain's praise. "Only fault is, he don't take no care of himself no more, body nor goods. Haf to guard him like a hen with one chick, I do. Money? Boys-oh-boys! He'd throw her to the birds. Why, Mr. Delaforce, ye know, I'll tell ye somep'n. I go round this house on dustin' days and pick money f'm under the clock, behind the books, off the carpet, everywheres, yes, sir; out the salt box one time. Lucky I'm honest. So fur. He's a holy caution. Every other way, he wants house kep' so neat a man has to go to Halifax to spit. But money? Any old gype in trouble, good or bad, he'd take hold and heave the whol' ship overboard for 'em! Why, Land of Izrul ——"

A voice overhead checked the enthusiast, with his mouth open and hand uplifted.

"Below there! More!"

Mr. Cook so far forgot himself as to wink, and hurried out, grinning.

He had been gone some time when Salem, who sat thinking, raised his head with a jerk and stared as if down the long dusky room he saw an alarming presence. He moved his chair quietly back, rose, and listened. Then, going without a sound, he crossed to the door of the hall, dodged out, and waited with one hand on the newel post. Like a thief escaping, he tried the front door, swung it ajar and slid through.

On the doorstep he paused long enough to study the written card above the holy-water clam shell:

"KEEP FULL FOR BIRDS.
PER ORDER, J. C."

From his shirt pocket Salem took the wad of envelope, unfolding it to read through smudge and stain the words written there. Again he looked down at the card.

A moment later Mr. Cook, returning silently downstairs, found him seated as before, alone at the head of the table.

XII

He climbed upstairs, afterward, with unwillingness and doubt. At the bedroom door he stood still, wondering what to do, what to say. But when at last he went in, he found these questions taken from him and set aside, his judgment called elsewhere.

"What d'ye think of them for whiskers?" The captain, sitting up among his bodyguard of the four Evangelists, frowned at his own face on the back of a large spoon. "Redder'n sin and twice as ugly. Like a brindle cat's hair glued on. If I had me some wire-coil ribs, and a len'th of spotted calica, you could stick me on top a Christmas stockin' for Jack-in-the-Box. Couldn't ye? What? Couldn't ye? Go look in that chist o' drawers, young man, fetch me the shears and I'll spread the glitterin' forfex wide, hey?"

Luckily for the captain's beard Salem rummaged the drawers in vain, and was soon recalled.

"Never mind. Come si' down. Tell me. You said they larned you to read, in there. How's that?"

Salem tried to explain.

"I mean, sir, it came over me," he replied, "that books were like a man talking to you, say."

Captain Constantine put away his convex mirror, and grunted.

"Some is. Some hain't," he declared. "Some's more like a infant teethin', and others like a spoilt monkey that needs him a dose o' physic. Good ones, yes; good ones is men. And what was that, about larnin' you to speak right?"

"Well, I studied to," Salem admitted, "but the minute Trapper and me—and I—got to going it, we slid right back into the old way."

His examiner gave a nod and a chuckle, as if well pleased.

"Nature," said he. "Nature. But come, I told you my worst trouble. What was yourn?"

The young man's face turned grave, and his answer was long in coming.

"Bad dreams." He did not know that he used the words of Hamlet, but he did know that for nothing in the world would he ever say more to any man. "Have 'em yet. Bad dreams."

"Poh! Them?" said the captain cheerfully. "Most every night I turn to and dream all my teeth has fell out. They say it's a sign you'll go on outlivin' everybody belongs to ye. How's

that for bad?" He sat thinking a while, then added: "Well, guess you're glad to be free, all one same. Trapper told ye, s'pose, how he got ye out?"

"Him?" cried Salem, and started. "Trapper? Why, Trapper couldn't recall nothing about it! Sent me to you."

Captain Constantine enjoyed a silent laugh which made the bed quiver. His eyes became hooded again, but between their heavy wrinkled lids two points of light seemed to perform a wicked, squinting dance.

"Couldn't recall nothing, hey? Well, well! That young hogset o' falsehood run dry, has he?" The bed continued to tremble. "Why, Trapper'd ought to be shot in the neck with a pickaxe. He can remember all he hears, and he hears more'n a preacher at a tea-canteloo."

Mirth gradually made the speaker slide under his counterpane, where he lay still, with his beard rumpled over his fists, and head on shoulder like one who might drop asleep weighing some pleasantry. When he roused a moment later it was to hoist his body upward and sit against the pillows erect. The look which he bent on Salem contained nothing of oddity.

"My boy, you got a big freckled lummox of

a friend there who's worth revealin' to ye." He spoke with quiet satisfaction. "That young red-headed rogue el'phant, he'd never let on. So I will. When you was took up first, for a spell Trapper he did think you done the deed. That never changed him to-wards you, not a mite. 'I don't care,' s'e, 'what a man's done!' Kind of extreme, till you know how to take the sayin'. Well, meantime, you in the lock-up house breathin' fire, atop of all comes to Trapper the sartain knowledge that old man Voe, Frizzly Obadiah, had off with your axe and dealt the stroke. On account of a daughter of his—Hannah, the pretty dark one, all red and brown and full of the Old Scratch. Or she was then. Poor Frizzly had so many child'n, thicker'n a run of alewives, nobody'd thought he could single out any one of 'em to care for that much. A widow man, too, so busy earnin' bread and shoe luther all round; but 'pears he did. Your axe he borrowed for to chop some pickerel holes, while carrying which on the ice he met Asy Beard and asked him like a man what he meant to do. Beard wa'n't a man, but a skunk, and answered accordin'; so to it they went in the snowstorm."

Salem nodded.

"Two days before I found it, then," said he.

"Wind hauled round afterward, and swept out Asy's head for me."

"Jes' so," agreed the captain. "And here was Trapper in a clove hitch with all this knowledge. One friend's life in danger, yourn; another, old Frizzly, would leave a herd of orphans; between ye, poor Trapper he was tore in two. What's more, he'd been fond of Obadiah's girl. I tell you, that boy suffered! Choose he must, alon', without help. Who's to judge him?"

Salem listened, with head hung down. Shame overpowered all other feeling as he replied:

"Not me."

"Nor me," the captain chimed in promptly. "Cut short, what Trapper done was to leave all and follow him. Wherever Frizzly went Trapper'd go. Whatever he worked at, Trapper'd git a job alongside if he could, or else hang round. Each man knowed the other knowed, but kep' his head shut, and they stayed friends. No tellin' where they might ha' fetched up. But come last spring, when the snow hankered on late as if to stay on the ground all summer, four of 'em was comin' out the woods, a sled and two hosses, Frizzly settin' aft on the lo'd. They crossed a cradle knoll, the ro'd made a bend on glary ice, down she slewed, whang, like a beetle on a waidge, and

there was poor old Obadiah Voe for ye, mashed again' a rock maple, pinned between hardwood and hardwood.

"Dark was comin' on. They got him clear, and did what they could, but saw they was goin' to lose their man. He'd turned blue as a whetston', Trapper says. The pair give each other one look.

" 'I'll tell ye now,' the old fellow whispers. 'Take her down quick.'

"So they did. Couldn't hardly see to write under the trees, nor hear what was left of his poor stove-in voice; but they did, and all signed with their hands numb.

"Then lawyers took holt of the plain fact, so you was lucky to git out by summer. Out at all."

A long silence fell in the room. From downstairs through open windows came the voice of Mr. Cook, chanting interminable words to the air of Villikins and His Dinah. Salem was the first to speak.

"Who's taking care of all those children, sir?"

Yesterday he had put the same question. He now got almost the same answer.

"Obadiah's? Oh, they're bein' well looked after." The captain glanced away, fidgeted, and pawing roundabout, recovered the spoon. He

took refuge in its mirror, with a set frown. "I can't jes' think, somehow. But they made Obadiah's mind easy, Trapper and 'mongst 'em did, before he went. His child'n are doin' all right."

Salem waited. No more being vouchsafed, he tried again.

"Don't see how Trapper could afford," said he, "to give up all his own affairs for mine so long. Trapper's got a mother to support."

This drew no reply whatever, but needed none, for the captain flung down his toy and sat glowering, a bearded image of distress, guile, and confusion.

"Better ask him. Git me an apple. I've talked my thro't as dry as a last year wossip's nest. What!" cried Constantine angrily, "can't ye choose better'n a powder-posted apple? Here, this one. Take it and meller it for me. Not there!" he roared. "Not on Mark, his jib was cut too p'inted. Meller it on Matthew."

Salem did as he was told, and bashed the apple against Matthew's glossy archaic hair. The captain's wrath subsided; he ate and grumbled apology. They sat talking at random till Salem got on foot to go.

"Where next after here?" inquired his host.

"To see a little girl," Salem answered. "A

child that lives down where the lock-up used to be."

"Child? Ho. So she was. So she was."

Salem took alarm.

"Was? Ain't she alive now?"

The captain's eyes began to twinkle, then suddenly grew rounder and more goatlike than ever.

" 'Course she is; 'course she is. Alive?" he echoed. "Mary Prior? They don't build 'em any livelier, hull, riggin' or ground tackle. Do. A good idee. Go see the child."

As the door was closing he shouted, "And come see me again too. Maybe tomorrer I'll git me my britches on, and go pestering the neighborhood some more. But come again, boy."

Salem promised and went out. On his way downstairs alone he paused, and stood with face lifted toward the shadows of the upper hall, where the glimmering hand rail vanished in a cool high dusk that smelled of cedar. Contempt for himself, who had brooded on his own part in the sum of what men suffer, likewise faded into a region obscure and tranquil. It was neither happiness nor grief, but something composed of both, fleeting yet perpetual, that poured through his mind with a cleansing wonder. Salem felt it, could almost hear it like music, passing upward

in the twilight. He stood a long time, then went down, content. To a whim of this old man above —no, he thought; to a pair of friends, who would never tell him so, but bandied him back and forth, he owed this moment of more than bodily freedom.

"I can't owe nothing smaller."

Again at the newel post he halted to give ear. Muffled behind some closed door, and mingling with a rattle of pans, the voice of the captain's "stewart" plaintively took up another verse:

A bold grenadier with the great Marshall Saxe
Had his head chopped clean off by a Lochaber axe,
But the sergeant replaced it so neat ere it fell,
That a handkerchief tied round his neck made all well.
Teary eye, teary eye, teary idle eye yea.

Before this miracle was over, Salem slipped into the dining room. His moccasins made no sound on the floor. He moved quickly, dividing as he went a packet of clean bank notes into little sheaves. One he had poked under time's black mausoleum, the marble clock, another beneath a silver trivet on the sideboard, when footsteps made him give back. They were the steps of

Mr. Orin C. Cook; but he only crossed his kitchen and began, above a plash of running water, to sing the great mythical hero who dared leap from a church spire into a bag of shavings.

Halfway down, his boy shouted, "There's glass
in the sack!"
So he turned right around in the air and jumped
back.
Teary eye, teary idle ——

Salem, grinning, darted to the model of the ship Cathance. He lifted her forward hatch, ran his third sheaf into her hold, and covered all but a green dog's-ear which he bent down over the coaming.

"That," he thought, in the sunny garden path, "leaves nothing but what's the right size."

XIII

THROUGH Salem's head that evening ran the old story of the man who set out to make a broadaxe, and ended by making a sizz. Of him the fable might have been told; for as he walked by sunset light down toward the alley of the jail and the wharves he was laughing at his own purposes, their fallen grandeur. He had imagined a vain thing: to return here like some storybook fellow, to make a speech, and to startle a child with his lordly mysterious gift; and now he was humbled, nothing remained but his "purse," three soiled green rags won by playing the clown in public.

Salem entered a shop on the way and exchanged them for cleaner money.

"Enough to buy her a dress," he thought. "Maybe something over for a doll."

He passed on, still thinking of the bungler with the broadaxe. Yes, that fable was of one Salem Delaforce, a born fool. In his ignorance he had tried to make something beyond his power, designing a great return for a little kindness, when lo, it was the other way about, the kindness great, his return pitiful. The child—he could see her

in his mind's eye, looking down through the jail window, removing a dandelion from her lips, to speak a word that raised him out of blackness toward her sunlight for a moment and kept him from sinking back a wild beast—the child had been a symbol. He had gone on believing in her, in it whatever it was, the justice of the kingdom of children, when there was nothing else and even that seemed idle. Now his sight was unbound, like the young man at Dothan, he saw what a host had been for him in secret.

"And she can buy her a doll." He laughed. "We'll make a good sizz."

Sunset poured down the road, turning dust to gold, blinding him with hot splendor full in the face. Black against it rose a pattern of intricate silhouette, gables, chimneys, drooping elms, little plateaus of piled lumber, aspiring topmasts. He had all the scene to himself, work for the day being over, the alley and wharves deserted. It was an evening hour so still that from miles away, in high pastures overlooking the river, a muted clank of cowbells faintly descended. Their slow-stepping music accompanied his thought, half heard at most. Salem knew only that something made him uneasy, perhaps a sound, perhaps the nature of his errand.

The green schooner Galilee had sunk deep at the wharf and waited in her oozy bed for the returning tide. A Maltese cat, curled asleep on her deck load, was the only living creature in sight. Mud flats filled the air with an evil smell.

Salem raised his hand and made a motion to knock, while watching the Galilee's cat below. His knuckles encountered empty air. He woke out of musing, turned, and looked.

Her doorstep and the whole house front lay just in shadow, at the edge of all the light and heat streaming by. Her door stood a little way ajar, inward, so that his hand by chance had found the opening. Blinds were drawn tightly down in both windows, but he caught a glimpse within of what might be subdued sunlight. Salem was about to knock with better aim, when something stayed his hand.

Beyond the door a play of shadow and a scuffling movement ceased or paused, then someone drew breath quickly as if in pain. At the same time he saw why the door was not shut, and could not be, to stay. Above its knob projected a bolt, shot home and left so, while on the floor lay an iron socket burst from the jamb, with rusty screws and crumbs of rotten wood.

"No! No!" cried a voice. "Leave this room, I tell you! Leave this house!"

It was a woman's voice, angry but not shrill, rather deepening than rising with indignation.

"You can't git away, my dear," replied another voice, a man's, rough, hoarse, cajoling, with a twang that Salem could almost remember. "Now don't take on so. I like ye, that's all. W'oa! See, you couldn't git away, didn't I tell ye?"

The woman spoke again, her scorn wavering closer and closer to tears.

"I know I can't. You're stronger than I am. Oh, it's cowardly ——"

Then came a whistle, repeated twice—a girl's whistle, thought Salem—after which a dog shut in somewhere began barking with ineffectual fury.

"He don't scare me non'. Look here ——"

"Go, before I call for help and put you to shame! Oh!"

Salem quickly and quietly slipped into the house. It was like passing at one step from full day to night, for the curtained room held only the glow of a lamp in one corner. White cloth, a mound of needlework on the table, enhanced this glow and cast it upward, so that what he saw chiefly was a girl's head and shoulders lighted from beneath. She had broken free, put the table

between her and some object of loathing. Over the lamp her eyes met Salem's at once, in a flash, a look that outran words to welcome him like one expected.

Unconscious of this meeting, a big rawboned young fellow made another step toward her. The room resounded with imprisoned barking, above which he raised his voice and laughed loud.

"Git out! Call? What fur? Little noise more or less don't worry this neighborhood."

Salem advanced behind him, to speak. His words were lost in the din. With that the girl nodded, turned her head away, and called, "Be still!"

The barking stopped. Both men remained facing her as if she had commanded them also to silence, while her eyes again rested their welcoming light on Salem. Wonder, incredulity, joy struggled in his heart with dismay. This young loveliness, tall as himself or nearly, was the child. He knew it only by her eyes, the same dark blue regarding him steadily but with an inward sparkle, and by the mingling of bronze light and dusk in her hair. Time had robbed him, a few years had cheated. He had lost even his symbol. But if she herself were real he did not care.

"This man troubling you?"

"Yes. Always." Her voice was calmer now, and it thrilled in Salem's ear like music. "He knows I live here alone. I sat working by the lamp so that the house would look as if nobody —— And he came and ——"

She pointed toward the door with the broken fastening. It had swung open when Salem came through. He nodded, and turned to the other man, who stood grinning at him.

"Come outside with me," said Salem.

This ugly red face displayed anger, surprise, but neither fear nor shame. While awaiting reply Salem knew the fellow; it was the same who had been loading planks aboard the Galilee that forenoon, and stopped to watch him like an enemy on her doorstep.

"Who in hell are you?" said the man. "And who ast you to come a-meddlin'?"

The harsh voice, and now at closer quarters, the flat nose and coarse thick mouth seen more clearly, brought further knowledge racing back through Salem's recollection. He and the speaker were old acquaintances. Grown somewhat heavier, this was the green-eyed lout who had mocked him, staring in at the jail window, and bringing that horror of a woman who laughed.

Salem only repeated his invitation.

"Come outside."

He spoke so mildly that the other no doubt thought him afraid. Salem's air of youthful slenderness, moreover, had deceived many a keener eye by day in the open. Now by lamplight, at all events, a great admirer of the ladies and not a bad judge of rough-and-ready fighting made a mistake which he was long to remember.

"You trot home, boy. We're busy." He gave a contemptuous laugh; then, finding his advice not taken, began an effort to stare Salem down, and made a discovery. "Why!" he jeered. "I know this thing! Delaforce the murd'rer. Then it's true what they tolt me." He swung round toward the girl. "Some rich fo'ks took and hired a sick man to lie him out o' prison."

She looked only at Salem, over the lamp, but her quick changing smile parted something between the men, disdain for one, kindness for the other.

"I know Mr. Delaforce better than that," she said. "We were friends when I was a little girl. You'll do well to go with him."

The green-eyed one could not flush deeper, but the unclean emotion with which his face was already burning altered for the worse.

"Ho! Friends, be ye? The jailbird! I seen him lurkin' round this forenoon, sneakin' after ye like a ——"

The simile which he employed might not bear repetition. To Salem—transfixed by a starry glance, his heart beating loud, his head swimming with the word she had granted—it came like something monstrous, not to be borne once. He drowned it with a roar, and choked. The room swayed like a ship, the walls melted, grew black, came closing in a circle that glimmered and went out as he caught the man blindly.

It would have dropped outdoors like empty clothing or a scarecrow, but it squirmed in the air, flew awry, and pitched down with a crash that made the house tremble.

"You talk like that," cried Salem, drawing his fists up to his head, "and I'll kill ye!"

The man lay still, crumpled against the door jamb. Salem turned from him. The girl had caught her lamp as it reeled, and steadied it without knowing. They looked at each other.

And then, in the stillness, not far away a bell began to ring. It jangled slowly, as if rung by an aimless hand, but all the while came nearer.

Salem let his arms drop, stared at the body on the floor, and with head hanging, cast a furtive

glance behind him, past one shoulder, then the other. He listened. It was no trick of the brain. In this phantasmal blending of lamplight and reflected sunshine he stood awake, and as plainly as his own breathing heard the bell ring.

What the girl saw next was a transformation that drove out of mind even what she had seen. Her deliverer—this calm, tall, dark young column of strength—began to totter before her. His eyes, questioning, burned out in despair and grew hollow; his face withered as if with age; and his limbs moved like those of an old man while he retreated, groped behind him, struck the arm of a chair by accident, and fell into it.

"Is there snow on the ground?"

She shook her head. Though her eyes had no power or wish to forsake his blank entreaty, she was aware that the body by the door moved, groaned, lifted its head, and crawling over the threshold, got up dizzily and fled or staggered away with one arm dangling. Afterward she knew, rather than saw, that down the hill passed a lumber wagon—a team of six horses going home to stable, bay horses, the leaders with a brass bell winking between them, and dirty blood-red ear tassels nodding from their bridles.

"Don't let it come in!"

She ran toward the door, and having closed it, stopped there in terror. This broken figure of a man sat watching her with eyes that looked out from another world.

As for Salem, he dared see nothing but her face. In the room, which had grown dim after the door swung to, something white moved toward him, and the dead Sagamore, his own dog whom he had buried long ago in winter, came and touched his knee with a pink muzzle that sniffed as though alive. He would not look away from her.

"Don't you go!"

She saw in his eyes the dread that all things were about to vanish.

"No," she said. "I am with you."

It took bravery, but she crossed the room and laid her hand on his arm. Then, her terror giving place to pity, she knelt by the chair.

"Don't go. If it passes—the winter bell. Stay long as you can."

His head fell on her shoulder. She let it rest there, as if she had been his mother. In a storm of weeping, like a great wind which tosses and strains to uproot a tree, he heard himself telling her all that no one was ever to hear.

XIV

A FORTNIGHT later day was breaking in the woods heavily, slowly, coming with effort through a chill smother of damp. It made itself felt more as darkness withdrawn than as light increased; morning seemed to have lost the way; and except for the sleepy chirping of a bird or two and a drip hardly begun among unseen branches, nothing promised that the world should ever wake again. A smell of last year's moldering leaves weighed down the wet obscurity. Not by sight but by the slope underfoot and a guess that a white-birch phantom was leaning where it ought to lean, Salem knew his ground. He was descending the northern side of Rum-Time Hill.

Halfway down, a sudden return of night overspread and told him that here stood the old hemlock. Salem halted and dropped on the grass his burden, a canvas bag holding load enough for a horse.

He parted the bushes on his right, walked straight in through black undergrowth for half a

dozen paces, then stopped and took from his pocket a candle end, which he lighted.

"Still here."

At his feet shone a dark pool no wider or deeper than a bucket, reflecting the pointed flame and his finger tips, until a baby frog hopped in and went kicking down.

"All choked with leaves," thought Salem. "Used to be big as a barrel."

He placed the candle in a socket of moss and himself on a rock. Beside him on a withered sapling butt hung a ragged film of iron rust. This, when Salem put it there last, had been a tin cup.

"Nobody come since, prob'ly."

The pool, a spring known to Indians dead and gone, had given the hill its name when river drivers halted there to mix grog of Santa Cruz rum or Medford. Salem found it a pleasant thought, for the moment, that he could go in the dark to places which, now the old-time people were no more, other men could not find by daylight.

"Nobody here since."

He made a birch-bark dipper and drank. The water was cold, clear, living as ever. He sighed, in part with satisfaction, in part with regret.

The spring grew quiet. The frog reappeared

later and clung to its margin, like a tiny scrap of puckered leather watching him with eyes. The candle burned steady and wore a faint halo in the mist. By its light Salem's face was that of a man who feared nothing behind him any more.

"Maybe I'll see her once or twice a year, when I go down."

For two weeks he had worked hard, earning money toward the supplies, the horseload in the bag. He had lacked time, ran his excuse—lacked courage, he knew in his heart—to return to her door until the day before yesterday, when no one answered his knock. He had not seen her after that night.

"Bawled like a baby," he thought.

But no, he was not ashamed. Doubt, ignorance or doubt, had kept him away. What could a man tell her, what could he have stammered to one who twice in his life had preserved his soul, reason, what you call it, from destruction?

"Round Christmas time, say, I'll try again."

He smiled, knowing well that he could not go without her so long.

"A lon'ly way of coming home, this is."

He had missed his other friends. A call at the captain's had brought forth only Mr. Cook, short-spoken, fidgety, and secretive: Captain Con-

stantine was "got up and traipsed off a-fishin' somewheres, when he ought to known better." Kingcome, too, was gone from mill and boarding-house without word left. Salem's good-byes had failed on every hand. He sat here very much alone in the night mist, by a forgotten well among rocks and trees.

"No good," he said aloud.

There was no pleasure, after all, in the things he knew best, in a gift like this of homing straight to places the most beloved. A choked spring: he would come with a spade one day and clear it: but a choked spring and a wafer of iron rust eaten through with holes, warned him what to expect. His cabin by the lake would be a dreary sight. He smelled the mustiness from here, felt in advance the peculiar melancholy that hovers in a dwelling retaken by weeds and forest growth.

He rose. His fellow thinker, the infant frog, at once deserted him and went down quite cheerful, swimming with hind legs only. Salem blew the candle out and waded through leaves to his bag. It seemed heavier than before, the mist darker. At the foot of the hill he went stumbling, now in moss-grown corduroy road, now in stale water or cold, drenching grass that lined the hollows of thank-you-marms.

He made good speed, however, for Lambkill Heath, seen from another hilltop, stretched gray without form under a border of black woods, these in turn under starlight filling a sky the darkness of which had as yet no more than a greenish tinge. The lower stars quivered and shook, all but the morning star, hung aloft like a tiny though intenser moon.

"Getting nigh home."

Salem crossed the heath in a brightening vapor. When fir woods again solemnly inclosed him he could see the grass of the winter sled road which he followed.

"Here 'tis."

He had reached the lake near his own cove before sunrise. Dropping the bag, he sat down. Blackened granite rocks, their bases faintly striped with paler bleaching, huddled among reeds at a margin of brown water. Beyond lay nothing but mist, as far as the hills now edged with radiance where the great star dissolved. It was a cold scene to look upon, the air biting.

"A poor time to visit your house in ruin. For old time's sake, better start the day with a swim. Rouse your blood, too."

Salem stripped, and climbed down to a flat rock from which he had often plunged. That

icy-looking smoke made a man blench, but he gathered himself, set his teeth, and dove.

He came up laughing, for the water was warm as new milk.

"I'd forgotten."

The smell of it, too, overcame him with remembrance, a frail sweetness blended of many hints —like green leaves crushed, or live trout, or willow bark just peeled—yet unlike them and without name, an exhalation from all forest roots and inland waters. He swam lazily, then floated on his back, watching the smoke curl upward, melt, and drift with patches of blue sky. A loon far away began to laugh.

From near by came a rippling sound as of some animal that swam quietly; a deer, perhaps, crossing the lake before sunrise. Treading water, Salem looked about; but he could see nothing, and lay back to float. The smell of water lilies, fresh and clean as rain, drew by on the surface.

Afterward, rolling over with a splash, Salem buried his face, then raised it, to swim out. For a moment, while his eyes were dripping, he thought he saw in the mist a shadow likeness of Mary Prior's face pass in profile toward shore. It faded slowly as a cloud picture. Although Salem's eyes did not often play false, the illusion

failed to startle him, for she had been in his head all the while. He buried his face again, went racing toward the farther shore, across deep water, turned at the edge of lily pads, and came racing back.

The sun warmed the grass and dried him, when at last he sat on shore by his bag. Dressing, he thought there came voices behind him, but listened and heard no more. A crow cawed somewhere among bright fluttering tops of poplar.

"Cook breakfast here and make tea?" Salem debated the question. "Or go up now and see the worst?"

It was better, he concluded, to have this forlorn part over with, and do his home coming while still in a glow. Salem jumped up and mounted the bank.

His house looked out at him from the deepest bend of the fir wall. It was not a ruin or overgrown, but stood there low and brown as ever, the door open, the chimney smoking. A yellow tent rose behind it.

"Someone's moved in. Some rascal's taken her over."

Salem drew near slowly. This might prove worse than what he had imagined. A hungry scent of bacon and coffee came out to greet him.

And then, white, glossy, half awake, out came Sagamore—the Second, but like the First alive again—to yawn and stretch on his doorstep. The dog's collar shone in the sun.

"We thought you'd like to find your house ready," said a voice that he knew. "So we came and pitched our tent."

Mary Prior had followed her dog to the threshold. She stood there smiling down at the wanderer. Indoors beyond her Salem caught a glimpse of Trapper's mother, Mrs. Kingcome, the little mother of a giant, who turned long enough from her cooking to throw him a bright-eyed welcome and a wave of her fork.

"The men," said Mary, "are camping above, in the next cove. There they come now."

A birch canoe gilded with sunlight stole in through the reeds, two weighty figures ballasting her. Trapper flourished his paddle. Captain John Constantine held in air a pickerel that seemed longer than his arm, and bellowed so that the woods rang:

"How's that for breakfast?"

Salem called back an inarticulate hail, and turned.

"You don't object?" said the girl.

His face shone.

"Object? I—I want to break something!" he cried. "You folks ——" He could not finish. "Why, then, we were! We were swimming in the lake together before sunrise!"

She was not so pale as he remembered her.

"Are you sorry," she asked, "not to have it all to yourself alone?"

THE END

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